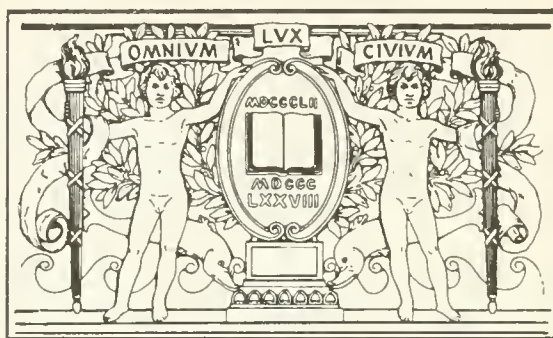


ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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THE BURNING OF "THE ENCHANTRESS"



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THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

GEORGES  
OR  
THE ISLE OF FRANCE

NEWLY TRANSLATED BY  
ALFRED ALLINSON

WITH THREE COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
MONRO S. ORR

METHUEN & CO.  
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.  
LONDON

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## INTRODUCTION

THE scene of the pretty and graceful story which goes by the name of its hero, the romantic half-caste, Georges Munier, is laid in the Mauritius, or as it was called by the French previously to the English occupation, The Isle of France. The leading interest depends on the rivalry between *white* and *black*, the ineradicable prejudice of the former against the latter, and the gallant but unavailing struggle of the hero, a rich mulatto planter's son educated in Europe, to break through the barrier. With this main thread is interwoven the account of a slave revolt, and a pleasing love story, how Georges woos and wins the beautiful Creole, Sara de Malmédie, to say nothing of a dashing description of the encounter of the rival squadrons of France and England, and the eventual conquest of the island by the British.

The sea-fight in question is *not* historical, nor are all its details entirely convincing to a sailor's mind, but it makes an exciting episode nevertheless. "Lord Williams Murrey" and "le capitaine Villougby" will be searched for in vain in the Biographical Dictionaries. At any rate, Dumas, when dealing with the sea and ships (did he not own a yacht of his own, and did he not sail her himself?), is *nothing if not* technical; and the great fight off Port Louis afforded some fine hard nuts for the translator to crack!

The amiable Eugène de Mirecourt—Jacquot of the "mercantilisme littéraire" accusations—says *Georges* was written by one Félicien Mallefille; but then Jacquot and Quérard and their like were always ready to affiliate any child of Dumas' pen on anybody—except of course the rightful parent, Alexandre Dumas. According to these gentry *Monte Cristo* itself was one half by Fiorentino, one half by Maquet! "It was such a simple thing to believe I was the author that they never so much as thought of it," was the great man's laughing comment.

In connection with this same M. Mallefille a good story is told, which we must apologize for borrowing from Mr. A. E. Davidson's admirable *Life and Works of Dumas*: "Speaking of Mallefille—one of his collaborators, and not one of the most remarkable—the master observed, as if pondering a problem, 'There is just something he lacks,—I can't define what it is,—to make him a man of talent.'

"'Perhaps he lacks the talent,' suggested some one.

"'Tiens!' said Dumas, 'well, perhaps you are right. I never thought of that.'"

The truth in the case of *Georges* seems to be that Mallefille, or somebody else

familiar with the Mauritius, supplied raw material and local colour ; Dumas did the rest. Anyhow there can be no doubt of this, that the hero, Georges Munier, who suffers humiliation and discouragement because of his "dash of the tar brush," but faces every obstacle and insult with irrepressible energy and spirit, is a fancy portrait of Dumas himself, Dumas "the inspired mulatto."

The book appeared in 1843,—just before, that is, the "annus mirabilis" that saw the birth of *Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*.



# GEORGES

## CHAPTER I

### THE ISLE OF FRANCE

**H**AS it never been your fate, on one of those long, cold, gloomy winter evenings when, alone with your own thoughts, you stood listening to the wind as it howled down the corridors and the rain as it beat at the windows, your brow resting against the mantelpiece and your eyes gazing, without seeing them, at the logs crackling on the hearth; has it never been your fate under such circumstances to be seized with a sick disgust of our dismal climate, this wet, muddy Paris of ours, and to dream fondly of some enchanted oasis, all carpeted with greenery and refreshed with cooling waters, where, no matter what the season, you might gently sink asleep beneath the shade of palms and jameroses, soothed by the babbling of a crystal spring and happy in the sensation of physical well-being and a delicious languor?

Well, this Paradise you dreamed of exists, this Eden you coveted awaits you. The streamlet that should lull you to soft slumber does actually plunge from its rocky height to rebound in spray, the palm that should guard your siesta does really spread its slender leaves to flutter in the sea-breeze like the plume on a giant's helm, the jameroses, laden with many-coloured fruitage, do veritably offer you their scented shade. Up then, and come with me!

Come to Brest, that warlike sister of commercial Marseilles, that armed sentinel watching over the ocean; and there, from among the hundred vessels sheltering in its harbour, choose one of those brigs with narrow beam, well-cut sails, and long tapering masts, such as Walter Scott's rival, the poetic chronicler of the sea, assigns to his pirates bold. We are in September, the month most propitious for long voyages. Get you aboard the ship to which we have entrusted our common fortune; let us leave the summer behind

us and sail to meet the spring. Adieu, Brest! Hail, Nantes and Bayonne! Adieu, France! See on our right that giant rising to a height of ten thousand feet, whose granite summit is lost in the clouds, above which it seems to hang suspended, and whose rocky foundations you can distinguish through the clear water descending into the depths. It is the peak of Teneriffe, the ancient Nivaria, the rendezvous of the sea-eagles you see wheeling round their eyries and looking scarce as big as pigeons. Pass on, this is not our journey's end; this is but the flower-garden of Spain, and I have promised you the Paradise of the World. Do you see on our left that bare and barren rock scorched incessantly by the tropic sun? It is the rock where the modern Prometheus was chained for six long years; the pedestal whereon England herself has reared the statue of her own shame; the counterpart of the pyre of Jeanne d'Arc and of the scaffold of Mary Stuart; the political Golgotha, for eighteen years the pious rendezvous of all vessels; but this is not where I am taking you. Pass on, we have no longer any business there; the regicide St. Helena is widowed of the relics of her martyr.

We are at the Cape of Storms. Do you see that mountain emerging from the haze? It is the same giant Adamastor which appeared to the author of the 'Lusiad.' We are passing the extremity of the earth; yonder jutting promontory is the prow of the world. See how the ocean breaks against it, furious but powerless; that good ship fears not its tempests, for its sails are set for the harbour of eternity, it has God Himself for pilot. Pass on, for beyond those verdant mountains we shall find barren tracts and sun-scorched deserts. Pass on, I have promised you clear water and sweet shade, fruits ever ripening and everlasting flowers.

Hail to the Indian Ocean! where the west wind urges us along; hail to the scene of the 'Thousand and One Nights';

we are approaching the end of our voyage. Here is the melancholy Bourbon, devoured by an eternal volcano. Give a glance at its flames, and a smile for its odours; sail a few knots further and let us pass between the *Ile Plate* and the *Coin-de-Mire*; let us double *Canonneers' Head* and stop at the flag-staff.

Let us drop anchor, the roadstead is good; our brig, wearied with her tedious voyage, craves rest. Besides, we have arrived, for this is the fortunate land which Nature seems to have hidden at the ends of the earth, as a jealous mother conceals from profane eyes the virginal beauty of her daughter; for this is the land of promise, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, the Isle of France.

Now, chaste daughter of the seas, twin sister of Bourbon, favoured rival of Ceylon, let me lift a corner of thy veil to show thee to the stranger-friend, the fraternal traveller, who accompanies me; let me unloose thy girdle, fair captive! for we are two pilgrims from France, and perhaps one day France will be able to redeem thee, rich daughter of the Indies, for the price of some petty kingdom of Europe. And you who have followed us with your eyes and thoughts, let me now speak to you of this wondrous land, with its ever-fruitful fields, with its double harvests, with its year made up of springs and summers following and replacing each other without intermission, linking flowers to fruits, and fruits to flowers. Let me tell of the romantic isle which bathes her feet in the sea and hides her head in the clouds; a second Venus, born, like her sister, of the foam of the waves, ascending from her wet cradle to her celestial empire, crowned with sparkling days and starry nights, eternal ornaments which she has received from the hand of the Creator Himself, and of which England has not yet had power to strip her.

Come then, and if aerial flights alarm you no more than voyages by sea, grasp, like a new Cleophas, a lappet of my cloak, and I will transport you with me to the inverted cone of the Pieterbot, the highest mountain in the island, next to the Peak of the Black River. Once arrived there, we shall look in all directions, successively to right and left, in front, behind, above us and below.

Above us, you see, is a sky always clear, studded with stars,—an azure carpet on which God raises at each of His

steps a golden dust, whereof each atom is a world.

Beneath us is the island, stretched at our feet like a map a hundred and forty-five leagues in circumference, with its sixty rivers that look from here like silver threads designed to chain the sea around its shores, and its thirty mountains all plumed with cocoas, *takamakas*, and palm-trees. Amid all these rivers see the water-falls of the *Réduit* and *La Fontaine*, which, out of the bosom of the woods they spring from, let loose their hurtling cataracts at headlong speed, to meet the sea which waits them, and, whether in calm or tempest, is aye ready to answer their eternal challenge, now with silent contempt, now with reverberating rage—a duel of Titans, each striving which shall make the greater noise and havoc in the world,—then near this wild scene of foolish rivalry, see the great, calm “Black River,” rolling down quietly its fertilising waters, imposing its respected name on all within its neighbourhood, showing thus the triumph of wisdom over force, and of calm over fury. Among all these mountains, see the gloomy *Brabant*, standing over the northern point of the Island as a gigantic sentinel to defend it against surprises of the enemy, and to break the fury of the ocean. See the peak of the *Trois-Mamelles*, at the base of which flow the rivers of the *Tamarin* and the *Rempart*, as though the Indian Isis had wished to justify her name in everything—see, lastly, the *Pouce*, next after the Pieterbot, where we are standing, the most majestic peak in the Island; it seems to raise a finger to the sky to show to master and to slave alike that there is a Tribunal above which will render justice to us all.

In front of us is Port Louis, formerly Port Napoléon, the capital of the Island, with its crowded wooden houses, its two streams which, after every storm, become torrents; its *Ile des Tonneliers*, defending the approaches, and its hybrid population, which seems to be a sample of all the nations of the earth, from the lazy Creole who is carried in a palanquin if he wants to cross the street, and who finds conversation so fatiguing that he has trained his slaves to obey his gestures, down to the negro hounded by the whip to his work in the morning and from it in the evening. Between these two extremes of the social ladder see the Lascars, distinguished by their red and green turbans, from which



two colours they never vary, with bold, bronzed features, a cross between the Malay and the Malabar types. See the Yoloff negro, of the tall and handsome Senegambian race, with complexion black as jet, eyes bright as carbuncles, teeth white as pearls; the Chinaman, short, flat-chested and broad-shouldered, with his bare skull and drooping moustaches, his jargon which nobody understands, but with whom, notwithstanding, everybody deals; for the Chinaman sells everything, runs all trades, follows all professions, is the Jew of the colony: then the Malays, copper-coloured, small, vindictive, cunning, always forgetful of a kindness, never of an injury; selling, like the Bohemians, things that one wants quite cheap: the Mozambiques, gentle, honest and stupid, and valued only for their strength: the Madagascans, thin, cunning, of an olive tint, flat-nosed and thick-lipped, distinguished from the negroes of the Senegal by the reddish reflection of their skin: the Namaquais, slim, skilful and proud, trained from their infancy in hunting the tiger and the elephant, and astonished at being transported to a country where there are no wild animals to fight: lastly, in the midst of all this, the English officer, garrisoned in the island or stationed in the harbour, with his round scarlet waistcoat, his cap-shaped head-gear, his white trousers, looking down from the height of his grandeur upon creoles and mulattos, masters and slaves, colonists and natives, talking only of London, boasting only of England, valuing only himself. Behind us, Grand Port, formerly *Port Impérial*, first established by the Dutch, but afterwards abandoned by them, because it lies to windward of the island and the same breeze which brings vessels in, prevents them from going out. So, after having fallen into ruins, it is to-day but a town whose houses barely rise above ground, a creek where a schooner comes to take shelter from the pirate's clutches, forest-covered mountains in which the slave seeks refuge from his master's tyranny. Next, bringing our eyes back to the landscape lying almost beneath our feet, we shall distinguish, behind the mountains by the harbour, Moka, perfumed with aloes, pomegranates, and currants; Moka, always so fresh that it seems to fold up the treasures of its attire in the evening to display them in the morning, which decks

itself every day as the other districts do only on festivals; Moka, the garden of this island which we have termed the garden of the world.

Let us resume our first position; let us face Madagascar and direct our eyes to our left: at our feet, beyond the Réduit, are the Williams plains, next to Moka the most delightful quarter of the island, bounded, towards the plains of St. Pierre by the *Corps-de-Garde* mountain, shaped like the hind-quarters of a horse; then, beyond the *Trois-Mamelles* and the great woods, the quarter of la Savane, with its sweetly-named rivers, 'Lemon-Trees,' 'Negresses' Bath,' and the 'Arcade,' with its harbour so well defended by the natural escarpment of its sides that it is impossible to land there otherwise than in friendly fashion; with its pastures rivaling those of the plains of St. Pierre, with its soil still virgin as that of an American prairie: lastly, in the depths of the woods, the great pond where are found *murænas* so gigantic that they are more like serpents than eels, and which have been seen to carry off and devour alive stags pursued by hunters and runaway negroes who had been so imprudent as to bathe there.

Next let us turn to the right: here is the quarter of the *Rempart*, dominated by the Mount of Discovery, on the summit of which rise ships' masts, which look from here as thin and small as willow branches; here is *Cap Malheureux*, the bay of the *Tombeaux*, the church of the *Pamplemousses*. In this quarter rose the two neighbouring huts of Madame de la Tour and Marguerite; on the *Cap Malheureux* the Saint-Géran went to pieces; in the bay of the *Tombeaux* was found the body of a girl holding a portrait clasped in her hand; in the church of the *Pamplemousses*, two months later, side by side with this girl, a young man of about the same age was buried. You have already guessed the names of these two lovers whom the same tombstone covers; they were Paul and Virginia, those two halcyons of the tropics, whose death the sea, as it moans on the reefs that surround the coast, seems evermore to bewail, as a tigress evermore laments her whelps rent to pieces by herself in a transport of fury or a moment of jealousy.

And now, whether you traverse the island from the pass of Descorne in the south-west, or from Mahebourg to the little Malabar, whether you follow the

coast or plunge into the interior, whether you descend the rivers or climb the mountains, whether the sun's blazing disc kindle the plains with flaming rays, or the crescent of the moon silver the mountains with melancholy light, should your feet be weary, or your head grow heavy, or your eyes close; should you feel your senses, intoxicated by the perfumed exhalations of the China rose, the Spanish or the red jasmine, dissolving gently as if under the influence of opium, you can yield, my companion, without fear or reluctance to the deep and penetrating voluptuousness of tropic slumber. Lie down, then, on the lush grass, sleep quietly and awake without fear, for this light noise which makes the foliage rustle at its approach, those two dark sparkling eyes which are fixed on you, are not the poisoned rustling of the Jamaican boqueira, nor the eyes of the Bengal tiger. Sleep softly, and awake without fear; the isle has never echoed the shrill hiss of a reptile, nor the nocturnal howl of a beast of prey. No, it is a young negress who parts two bamboo branches to push her pretty head through and look with curiosity at the newly-arrived European. Make a sign, without even stirring from your place, and she will pick you the savoury banana, the scented mango or the tamarind-husk; speak a word, and she will answer you in her guttural and mournful tone, 'Mo sel-lave, mo faire ça que vous vié' ('Me slave-girl, me do what you will'). Only too happy should a kind look or a word of satisfaction reward her services, she will then offer to act as your guide to her master's dwelling. Follow her; it matters not whither she leads you; and, when you perceive a pretty house with an avenue of trees, engirdled by flowers, you will have arrived; it will be the home of the planter, tyrant or patriarch, according as he is good or bad; but, be he the one or the other, that is not your concern and affects you but little. Enter boldly; go and sit down at the family table; say, 'I am your guest'; and then will be placed before you the richest china plate, loaded with the finest bananas, the silver goblet with its bottom of glass, in which will foam the best beer of the island; you will shoot to your heart's content in his savannahs, and fish in the river with his lines, and each time you come yourself or introduce a friend to him, the fatted calf will be killed; for here the arrival of a guest is made a

festival, as the return of the Prodigal Son was a joy to his father's household.

So the English, with their eternal jealousy of France, long fixed their eyes on her beloved daughter, hovering round her incessantly, now trying to seduce her with gold, now to intimidate her by threats; but to all these proposals the beautiful Creole replied with supreme disdain, so that it soon became apparent that her lovers, unable to win her by their wiles, were fain to carry her off by force, and that she must be kept in sight like a Spanish *monja*. For some time she had nothing worse to fear than a series of unimportant and ineffectual attempts; but at last England, unable to resist her charms, threw herself headlong upon her, and when one fine morning the Isle of France learned that her sister Bourbon had just been carried off, she besought her protectors to keep a yet stricter guard over her than in time past, and knives began to be sharpened in deadly earnest and bullets to be melted, as the enemy was momentarily expected.

On the 23rd of August, 1810, a terrific cannonade, reverberating through all the island, announced that the enemy had actually arrived.

## CHAPTER II

### LIONS AND LEOPARDS

IT was five in the evening towards the end of one of those magnificent summer days unknown in our Europe. Half the population of the Isle of France, arranged in a semi-circle on the mountains which dominate Grand-Port, were breathlessly watching the contest going on at their feet, as in olden days the Romans leaned over the gallery of the amphitheatre at a contest of gladiators or a combat of martyrs. Only, on this occasion, the arena was a large harbour environed by rocks on which the combatants had run themselves aground to prevent all possibility of retreat, and, freed from the distracting anxiety of evolutions, be able to tear each other to pieces at their ease: neither again were there any vestal virgins with upturned thumbs to put an end to this terrible sea-fight: it was, as was fully understood, a strife of extermination, a



combat to the death; accordingly the ten thousand spectators present at it maintained an anxious silence, while the very sea, so often stormy in those regions, was still, so as not to lose one roar of those three hundred mouths of fire.

This is what had happened. On the morning of the 20th Captain Duperré, coming from Madagascar in the *Bellone*, accompanied by the *Minerve*, *Victor*, *Ceylan* and the *Windham*, had sighted the Mountains of the Wind in the Isle of France.

As three previous fights in which he had been without exception victorious had caused severe damage to his fleet, he had determined to enter the large harbour and refit there,—a course which was the more easy because, as is well known, the Island at this time was entirely in our power, and the tri-coloured flag floating over the fort of the *Ile de la Passe*, and from a three-master anchored below it, gave the worthy sailor the assurance of being welcomed by friends. Consequently Captain Duperré gave orders to double the *Ile de la Passe*, situated about two leagues in front of *Mahebourg*, and, to carry out this manœuvre, ordered the corvette *Victor* to go ahead, followed by the *Minerve*, *Ceylan* and *Bellone*, the *Windham* concluding the line. The squadron then advanced, each ship in front of the next one, the narrow entrance not allowing of two ships passing alongside each other.

When the *Victor* was within cannon-range of the three-master lying broadside beneath the fort, the latter signalled that the English were cruising within sight of the Island. Captain Duperré replied that he was quite aware of it, and that the flotilla which he had observed was composed of the *Enchantress*, *Nereïd*, *Sirius* and *Iphigenia*, commanded by Commodore Lambert; but that as, on his own side, Captain Hamelin was stationed to windward of the Island with the *Entreprenant*, *La Manche* and *Astrée*, he was sufficiently strong to accept battle should the enemy present himself.

A few moments later, Captain Bouvet, who was second in the line, thought he observed some hostile indications in the vessel that had just signalled; besides he had in vain examined all her details with that piercing glance that so rarely deceives the sailor, but could not recognise her as belonging to the French navy. He communicated his observations to Captain

Duperré, who told him in answer to take precautions, and that he would do the like. As for the *Victor* it was impossible to give her information; she was too far ahead, and any signal made to her would have been seen from the fort and the suspected vessel.

The *Victor* then continued to advance without misgivings, impelled by a gentle south-east breeze, with all her crew on deck, while the two ships that follow her anxiously watch the movements of the three-master and the fort. Both, however, still keep up an appearance of friendship; indeed the two vessels when opposite each other exchange a few words. The *Victor* continues her course; she has already passed the fort, when suddenly a line of smoke appears on the sides of the ship that lies broadside towards her and on the rampart of the fort. Forty-four guns thunder at once, raking the French corvette, cutting her rigging and sails, decimating her crew, carrying away her fore-top-sail yard, while at the same instant the French colours disappear from the fort and the three-master and give place to the English flag. We have been duped by trickery, and have fallen into the trap laid for us.

But instead of going back, which might still be possible by abandoning the corvette which has acted the part of a scout and now, having recovered from her surprise, is replying to the fire of the three-master with her two stern-guns, Captain Duperré signals the *Windham*, which makes for sea again, and orders the *Minerve* and *Ceylan* to force the channel. He himself will support them, while the *Windham* goes to warn the rest of the French fleet of the situation in which the four vessels are.

Then the ships continue to advance, no longer with the unguardedness of the *Victor*, but with lighted lintstocks, each man at his post, and in that profound silence which always precedes a great crisis. Presently the *Minerve* gets alongside the hostile three-master, but this time it is she who strikes first. Twenty-four mouths burst into flame together; the broadside pierces her hull through and through; but part of the bulwarks of the English vessel is cut away; stifled shrieks are heard, then in her turn she thunders with her whole battery and sends back to the *Minerve* as deadly messengers as she has just received from her, while the artillery



of the fort bursts out upon her as well, but without doing her any other injury than killing a man or two and cutting some of her rigging.

Next comes the Ceylan, a pretty brigantine with twenty-two guns, taken, like the Victor, Minerve, and Windham, a few days previously from the English, and which, like the Victor and Minerve, was now about to fight for France, her new mistress. She advances lightly and gracefully, as a sea-bird skims the waves; then, when opposite the fort and the three-master, all three break out into flames together, firing so simultaneously that the volleys formed one sound, and so close to each other that their smoke was intermingled.

There remained Duperré, in the Bellone. He was even at this period one of the bravest and most skilful officers in our navy. He advanced, hugging the *Ile de la Passe* more closely than any of the other vessels had done; then, at close quarters, broadside to broadside, the two ships burst into flame, at pistol-range. The channel was forced; the four ships were within the harbour; they rally at the cliff of the *Aigrettes* and cast anchor between the *Ile aux Singes* and the *Pointe de la Colonie*. Duperré having at once put himself in communication with the town, learns that Bourbon is taken, but that, in spite of his attempts on the Isle of France, the enemy has only been able to seize the *Ile de la Passe*. A messenger is at once despatched in all haste to General Decaen, Governor of the Island, to inform him the four French vessels, Victor, Minerve, Ceylan and Bellone, are at Grand-Port. At noon on the 21st Decaen receives this advice, transmits it to Captain Hamelin, who orders the ships under his command to get under weigh, hurries reinforcements of men across country to Captain Duperré, informs him that he will do what he can to come to his aid, inasmuch as everything leads him to the conclusion that he is threatened by superior numbers.

As a fact, in endeavouring to anchor in the *Rivière Noire* at four a.m. on the 21st, the Windham had been captured by the English frigate Sirius. Captain Pym, Commander of the latter, had then learned that four French ships under Duperré's orders had entered Grand-Port, where they were confined by the wind; he had at once informed the captains of the *Enchantress* and *Iphigenia* of this, and the

three frigates had sailed immediately. The Sirius went back towards Grand-Port, going before the wind, the two other frigates turning to windward to reach the same point.

These were the movements which Captain Hamelin had seen, and which by their agreement with the news he had just heard cause him to think that Captain Duperré is about to be attacked. He hastens therefore to get under weigh, but in spite of all diligence he is only ready on the morning of the 22nd. The three English frigates are three hours in advance of him, and the difficulty he must experience in reaching Grand-Port is still further increased by the wind, which is set in the south-east and freshening momentarily.

On the evening of the 21st General Decaen mounts his horse and arrives at Mahebourg at five in the morning, followed by the chief planters and those of their negroes on whom they think they can rely. Masters and slaves are armed with guns, and have each fifty rounds, in case the English should attempt to land. A meeting takes place between him and Duperré. At noon the English frigate Sirius, which has sailed to leeward of the Island, and consequently experienced less difficulty in her passage than the other two frigates, appears at the entrance of the channel, meets the three-master moored with her broadside to the fort, now recognised as the frigate *Nereïd*, Captain Willoughby. As though reckoning to attack the French division by themselves, both advance upon us, taking the same course as we had done; but, keeping too close to the shoal water, the Sirius runs aground and her crew spend the rest of the day in getting her off.

During the night the reinforcement of sailors sent by Captain Hamelin arrives, and is distributed among the four French ships, who thus amount to nearly fourteen hundred men with a hundred and forty-two guns, but as immediately on their distribution Duperré has made his division run aground, so that each vessel presents its broadside, only the half of the guns will take part in the sanguinary feast that is preparing.

At two o'clock the frigates *Enchantress* and *Iphigenia* appeared in their turn at the entrance of the channel, met the Sirius and *Nereïd* and advanced all four to encounter us. Two ran themselves

aground, the other two lay moored at anchor, presenting a total of seventeen hundred men and two hundred guns. It was a solemn and terrible moment when the ten thousand spectators who thronged the mountains saw the hostile frigates advance with furled sails, impelled only by the slow force of the wind through their rigging, and, with the confidence imparted by superiority of numbers, range themselves at half-gunshot from the French division, presenting in their turn their broadsides, grounding as we had grounded, abandoning retreat beforehand, as we had abandoned it.

A battle of extermination, then, was about to commence; lions and leopards had met, and were about to rend each other with brazen teeth and roars of fire.

It was our sailors who, with less patience than the French guards had shown at Fontenoy, gave the signal for slaughter. A long train of smoke rushed from the sides of the four vessels at whose peak flew the tricolour; then at the same moment bellowed forth the roar of seventy guns, and the iron hurricane fell upon the English squadron.

The latter answered promptly, and then began, with no other manœuvre than that of clearing from the decks the splinters of timber and expiring bodies, with no interval but that of loading the guns, one of those struggles to the death such as, since Aboukir and Trafalgar, naval annals had not witnessed. At first it might be thought the advantage lay with the enemy; for the first English volleys had cut the springs on the hawsers of the *Minerve* and the *Ceylan*, so that, owing to this accident, the fire of these two ships was to a large extent masked. But, under the captain's orders, the *Bellone* met every event, replying to the four ships at once; having arms, powder and shot for all; incessantly belching forth fire like a volcano in eruption, and that for two hours, that is to say, while the *Ceylan* and *Minerve* were repairing their injuries. This done, as though impatient of their inaction, they began again to roar and bite in their turn, forcing the enemy, who had turned from them for a moment to crush the *Bellone*, to pay attention to them once more, and restoring the unity of the fight along the whole line. It then seemed to Duperré that the *Nereïd*, already damaged by three broadsides which the squadron had fired at her when forc-

ing the channel, was slackening her fire, and the order was at once given to direct all the firing at her and to give her no rest. For a whole hour they overwhelmed her with shot and grape, thinking at each moment that she would strike her flag; but, as she did not do so, the hail of iron continued, mowing down the masts, sweeping her deck, piercing her hull, until her last gun died away like an expiring sigh, and she remained a demolished hulk in the stillness and silence of death.

At this moment, and while Duperré was giving an order to his lieutenant Roussin, a grape-shot struck his head and knocked him over against the guns. Realising that he was dangerously, perhaps mortally, wounded, he calls Captain Bouvet, hands over to him the command of the *Bellone*, orders him to sink the four ships rather than surrender them, and, after giving these final orders, extends his hand to him and swoons away. Nobody perceives this incident; Duperré has not left the *Bellone*, since Bouvet takes his place.

At ten o'clock it is so dark that the men can no longer take aim and have to fire at random. At eleven the firing ceases; but as the spectators understand that it is only a truce, they remain at their post. As a fact, at one o'clock the moon rises, and by its pale light the strife begins afresh.

During this short respite the *Nereïd* has received some reinforcements; five or six of her guns have been refitted; the frigate that was thought dead was only in a swoon and recovers her senses, giving signs of life by attacking us afresh.

Then Bouvet sends Lieutenant Roussin on board the *Victor*, whose captain is wounded, with orders to float the ship again and go and overwhelm the *Nereïd* at close quarters with his whole artillery. This time his firing will not cease until the frigate be really dead.

Roussin carries out his order to the letter; the *Victor* sets her top-sails and jib, moves off and, without firing a single shot, anchors three or four fathoms from the *Nereïd*'s stern; from there she opens fire, to which the *Nereïd* can only reply with her stern guns, raking her from poop to prow at each discharge. At dawn the frigate is silent once more. This time she is really dead, yet, notwithstanding, the English flag still floats at her peak. She is dead, but she has not surrendered. At



this moment, shouts of 'Long live the Emperor!' resound from the Nereïd—the seventeen prisoners whom she took in the Ile de la Passe and had placed in the hold, burst from their place of confinement, and escape up the hatchways with a tri-coloured flag in their hands. The standard of Great Britain is lowered, the tri-colour floats in its place. Roussin gives the order to board, but at the moment when he is about to fasten the grappling-irons, the enemy directs his fire on the Nereïd, which escapes him. To continue the struggle is useless; the Nereïd is nothing but a hulk, on which he will lay hands as soon as the other ships are subdued. The victor leaves the frigate floating like the carcase of a dead whale, takes on board the seventeen prisoners and resumes her place of battle, announcing to the English, by firing her whole broadside, that she had returned to her position.

All the French ships were now ordered to direct their fire on the Enchantress, Bouvet wishing to demolish the hostile frigates one after the other. Towards three p.m. then the Enchantress became the target for all their shots; at five, she answered our fire spasmodically, and breathed like a combatant mortally wounded; at six o'clock it could be seen from the land that her crew were making all preparations for abandoning her. Shouts first, then signals, warn the French division of this; the firing is redoubled; the two other hostile frigates despatch their boats to her; she herself lowers her cutters into the sea; the remnant of unwounded, or slightly-wounded men get into them, but in the space which they have to cross to reach the Sirius two boats are sunk by cannon shot, and the sea is strewn with men making for the neighbouring frigates by swimming.

A moment later a thin smoke issues from the portholes of the Enchantress; then it becomes gradually thicker; next, at the hatchways wounded men are seen dragging themselves along, raising their mutilated arms, appealing for help; for already smoke is followed by flames which dart their fiery tongues through every porthole. Then they burst outside, creep along the netting, climb to the masts, envelop the yards, and in the midst of these flames are heard cries of rage and pain; then all at once the vessel splits, as the crater of a volcano is rent

asunder. A fearful explosion is heard; the Enchantress is blown to bits. The eye follows the burning fragments which mount to the sky, descend again and are extinguished with a loud hissing sound in the waves. Of that fine frigate, which the day before thought herself queen of the ocean, nothing remains, not even débris, not even the wounded, not even the dead. A wide space between the Nereïd and the Iphigenia alone indicates the place where she was.

Then, as though weary of the strife, dismayed at the spectacle, English and French fell silent, and the rest of the night was consecrated to repose.

But at dawn the fight begins again. The French division has chosen the Sirius this time as its victim, and the four-fold fire of Victor, Minerve, Bellone, and Ceylan are about to crush her. Shot and grape are concentrated upon her. At the end of two hours she has not a mast left, her bulwarks are cut down, the water enters her hull through twenty wounds; had she not been aground she must have sunk. Her crew then abandons her, the captain being the last to leave. But, as with the Enchantress, the fire has remained there; a train conducts it to the magazine; and at eleven in the forenoon a fearful explosion is heard, and the Sirius disappears annihilated.

Then the Iphigenia, which has fought at anchor, realises that no more fighting is possible. She remains alone against four; for, as we have said, the Nereïd is nothing now but a sheer hulk; she makes sail, and, profiting by the fact that she has escaped almost safe and sound from all this destruction, tries to sheer off, in order to place herself under the protection of the fort.

Bouvet at once orders the Minerve and Bellone to refit and get afloat again. Duperré, on the blood-stained bed where he is laid, has learned all that has happened: he does not want a single frigate to escape destruction, nor a single Englishman to go and announce their defeat in England. We have to avenge Trafalgar and Aboukir. Pursue the Iphigenia!

And the two noble frigates, battered as they are, rouse and recover themselves, make sail and away in pursuit, ordering the Victor to man the Nereïd. As for the Ceylan she is herself so damaged that she cannot quit her place until the caulker has stopped her thousand gaping wounds.



Then loud shouts of triumph rise from the land ; the whole population, which has kept silence, recovers breath and voice to encourage the Minerve and Bellone in their pursuit. But the Iphigenia, less damaged than her two foes, gains on them visibly, passes the Ile des Aigrettes, will reach the fort of la Passe, will gain the open sea and escape. Already the shot from the Minerve and Bellone fail to reach her, dropping in her wake, when suddenly three ships appear at the entrance of the channel, flying the tri-colour ; it is Captain Hamelin, who had sailed from Port Louis with the Entreprenant, and La Manche and Astrée. The Iphigenia and the fort are caught between two fires ; they will surrender at discretion, not an Englishman will escape. During this time the Victor has for the second time drawn close to the Nereïd ; and, fearing a surprise, boards her cautiously. But the silence she maintains is truly that of death. Her deck is strewn with corpses ; the Lieutenant, who was the first to set foot on her, is up to his ankles in blood.

A wounded man raises himself and relates that six times the order was given to strike the flag, but six times the French discharges carried away the men told off to carry out this order. Then the Captain retired to his cabin and was seen no more.

Roussin goes towards the cabin and finds Captain Willoughby seated at a table, on which are still a jug of grog and three glasses. He has an arm and a thigh carried away. In front of him his first Lieutenant Thomson, killed by a grape-shot, which struck him in the chest ; at his feet lies his nephew, William Murray, likewise wounded in the side by a grape-shot.

Then Willoughby with his remaining hand makes a movement to give up his sword ; but Lieutenant Roussin, in his turn extending his arm, salutes the dying Englishman, saying :—" Captain, when a man uses a sword as you have done, he surrenders it to God alone ! "

And he at once orders every possible attention to be lavished upon Captain Willoughby. But all aid was useless ; the brave defender of the Nereïd died on the morrow.

Lieutenant Roussin was more fortunate as regards the nephew than he had been with the uncle. Lord Murray, though wounded deeply and dangerously, was not

mortally hurt. Accordingly we shall see him reappear in the course of this history.

## CHAPTER III

### THREE CHILDREN

AS may well be imagined, the English, though they had lost four vessels, had not abandoned their designs on the Isle of France ; on the contrary, they had now both a fresh conquest to make and an old defeat to avenge. Accordingly, hardly three months after the events which we have just laid before the reader, a second struggle no less desperate, but destined to result very differently, had taken place at Port Louis itself, that is to say, at a spot in exactly the opposite direction to that where the former took place.

This time it was not a question of four ships or eighteen hundred men. Twelve frigates, eight corvettes and fifty transports had landed twenty or twenty-five thousand men on the coast, and the invading army was advancing on Port Louis, then called Port Napoléon. This was the capital of the island, and at the moment of being attacked by so large a force presented a spectacle difficult to describe. Everywhere the multitude, hurrying in from different quarters of the island and crowded together in the streets, showed signs of the greatest excitement ; as nobody knew the real danger, every one invented some imaginary peril, and those which obtained most credence were the most exaggerated and unheard-of ones. From time to time some aide-de-camp of the General in command would appear suddenly, bringing an order and tossing to the crowd a proclamation intended to arouse the hatred which the Nationalists bore towards the English and to excite their patriotism. On its being read out, hats were raised on the points of bayonets ; shouts of " Long live the Emperor " resounded ; oaths to conquer or die were exchanged ; a shiver of enthusiasm ran through the crowd, which passed from a state of noisy idleness to one of furious activity, and rushed headlong from all quarters, demanding to march upon the enemy.

But the real meeting-place was the Place d'Armes, that is to say, in the centre of the town. Thither were continually arriving, now an ammunition waggon dragged helter-skelter by two small horses of Timor or Pegu, now a gun brought in at full gallop by the National Artillery, young fellows of fifteen to sixteen years of age, for whom the powder that blackened their faces took the place of beards. There, too, assembled the Civic Guards in fighting trim, Volunteers in miscellaneous garments, who had added bayonets to their sporting guns; negroes clothed in remnants of uniforms and armed with carbines, sabres and lances; all these mingling, colliding, crossing one another, upsetting one another, contributing each his share of noise to the insistent rumour which rose above the town, just as the hum of an innumerable swarm of bees ascends from a large hive.

Once arrived, however, at the Place, whether rushing in singly or in groups, these men assumed a more regular appearance and a calmer demeanour. At the Place d'Armes was stationed, while waiting for the order to march against the enemy, half of the garrison of the Island, composed of regular troops and forming a total of fifteen to eighteen hundred men, whose attitude, at once proud and nonchalant, was a silent reproach to the noise and confusion made by those who, less familiar with scenes of this kind, had nevertheless the courage and goodwill to take part in them. Accordingly, while the negroes hurried pell-mell to one end of the great square, a regiment of national Volunteers, restraining themselves at sight of the military discipline of the Regulars, halted in front of the troops, forming in the same order as they, and trying, though without success, to imitate the regularity of their lines.

He who appeared to be the leader of this last body of men, and who, it must be said, gave himself infinite trouble to attain the result we have indicated, was a man from forty to forty-five years of age, wearing a Major's epaulettes, and endowed by nature with one of those insignificant faces to which no emotion can succeed in imparting signs of intelligence or character. For the rest, he was curled, shaved, smartly got up as if for parade; only, occasionally, he unfastened a clasp of his coat, originally buttoned from top to bottom but which gradually opening,

displayed to view an embroidered vest, frilled shirt and white tie with embroidered ends. Near him, a pretty child of twelve, attended by a household negro who stood some yards away, dressed in a suit of dimity, displayed, with that ease which the habit of being well-dressed imparts, his large scalloped collar, his jacket of green camlet with silver buttons, and his grey beaver adorned with a feather. At his side hung with his sabretache the scabbard of a little sword, the blade of which he held in his right hand, trying to copy, as well as he could, the martial bearing of the officer, whom he took care, from time to time to address very loudly as "Father," a title with which the Major seemed no less flattered than by the illustrious rank in the national militia to which the confidence of his fellow-citizens had raised him.

At a short distance from this group which swaggered so gaily, might be distinguished another, less brilliant no doubt, but certainly more remarkable. It consisted of a man from forty-five to forty-eight years of age, and two children, one aged fourteen and the other twelve.

The man was tall and thin, of bony frame, a little bent, not by age, since, as we have said, he was not more than forty-eight at the outside, but by the humility of a subservient position. From his copper tint and slightly woolly hair one could recognise at first glance one of those Mulattos whose fortunes, which are often enormous and the result of their own well-directed industry, avail nothing in the Colonies to excuse their colour. He was dressed with rich simplicity, held in his hand a carbine embossed with gold, armed with a long slender bayonet, and had at his side a cuirassier's sabre which, thanks to his great height, hung along his thigh like a sword. His pockets bulged with cartridges, in addition to those contained in his pouch.

The eldest of the two children who accompanied him was, as we have said, a tall lad of fourteen whose sporting pursuits, more than his negro origin, had deepened his complexion. Thanks to the active life he had led he was as strong as a young man of eighteen, and thus had obtained his father's leave to share in the engagement which was soon to take place. He, on his side, was armed with a double-barrelled gun, the same which he used in his expeditions across the island,



and with which, young as he was, he had already gained a reputation for skill which the most celebrated hunters envied him. But, at the present moment, his actual age overcame his apparent age; for having laid his gun down on the ground, he was rolling over and over with an enormous Madagascar hound, which seemed to have come there in case the English should have brought any of their bulldogs with them.

The young hunter's brother, younger son of the man of tall stature and humble mien, who completed the group we have endeavoured to describe, was a child of about twelve, whose slim and puny build bore no relation to his father's great height or the powerful frame of his brother, who seemed to have united in himself alone the vigour intended for both; in contrast therefore to Jacques, as the oldest was called, little Georges seemed two years younger than he really was, so far did his short stature, his pale, thin, and melancholy face, shaded by long dark hair, betoken a lack of the physical strength so common in the Colonies. But, to make up for this, you might read in his uneasy, penetrating look such an eager intelligence, and in the precocious knitting of the brows which was already habitual to him, such a manly reflection and such firmness of will, that you were amazed to meet with such insignificance and such vigour united in one and the same individual.

Having no weapons, he kept close by his father and grasped with all the strength of his little hand the barrel of the handsome embossed gun, turning his eager and inquiring eyes from his father to the Major, asking inwardly, no doubt, why his father, who was twice as rich and strong and clever as the other, did not also boast like him some honourable badge or individual mark of rank.

A negro in waistcoat and trousers of blue cloth was waiting, as his comrade was for the child with the scalloped collar, till the time came for the men to march, for the boy would stay behind with him while his father and brother went to fight.

The noise of cannon had been heard since morning, for General Vandermaesen with the other half of the garrison had marched out to meet the enemy, so as to check them in the defiles of the Long Valley and at the crossing of the Pont-Rouge

and Lataniers rivers. He had held on with tenacity the whole morning; but, not wishing to risk all his forces at one blow, and fearing besides that the attack which he met might be merely a feint during which the English would advance on Port-Louis by some other route, he had taken with him only eight hundred men, leaving the rest of the garrison, as has been said, and the national volunteers to defend the town. The result was that, after prodigies of courage, his small force, which had to deal with a body of four thousand English and two thousand sepoys, had been obliged to evacuate position after position, taking advantage of every accident of the ground, but soon forced to retire again; so that from the Place d'Armes, where the reserves were, it was possible, though the actual combatants were invisible, to calculate the progress the English were making by the increasing roar of the artillery drawing nearer and nearer every minute. Presently could be distinguished, between the thunders of the big guns, the crackling of musketry. But it must be confessed that this noise, instead of frightening those defenders of Port-Louis who, condemned to inaction by their General's orders, were stationed in the Great Square, only stimulated their bravery; so much so that, while the Regulars were content to bite their lips or swear beneath their moustaches, the Volunteers brandished their weapons, grumbling openly, and crying that, if the order to start was delayed any longer, they would break their ranks and go and fight as skirmishers.

At this moment there was a general shout, at the same time an aide-de-camp galloped up and, without even entering the Place, raising his hat to attract attention, shouted from the end of the street:—

“To your entrenchments; the enemy is here!”

Then he went off as fast as he had come.

At once the drum of the regulars sounded, and the soldiers, forming line with the quickness and precision of long habit, started off at the double.

Whatever rivalry might exist between the Volunteers and the Regulars, the former could not get away with so rapid a dash. Some moments elapsed before the ranks were formed; then as, when they were formed, some led off with the right foot, others with the left, there was a moment of confusion necessitating a halt.



At this moment, seeing a vacant place in the middle of the third file of volunteers, the tall man with the ornamented gun embraced the youngest of his children and, putting him into the arms of the negro in the blue suit, ran with his eldest boy modestly to occupy the place which the false start of the Volunteers had left vacant.

But, at the approach of the two pariahs, their neighbours on the right and left turned aside, forcing the same movement upon the men next to them, so that the tall man and his son found themselves the centre of circles which went moving from them, just as circles of water retire from the spot at which a stone has been thrown in.

The stout man in Major's epaulettes, who had with great difficulty just got his first file in order, now perceived the disorder into which the third was being thrown; rising on his toes, he shouted to those who were executing the singular manœuvre which we have described:—

"To your ranks, my men! to your ranks!"

But at this repeated order, made in a tone that admitted no reply, a general shout arose:—

"No blacks! no blacks with us!"

This cry the entire battalion echoed with a universal roar.

Then the officer understood the cause of this disorder, and saw in the centre of a large circle the mulatto who had remained at the "port arms," while his elder son, red with anger, had already fallen back two paces to get away from those who were pushing him back.

On seeing this, the Major passed through the two front ranks which opened to make way for him, and went straight for the insolent fellow who had dared, man of colour as he was, to mix with the whites. When in front of him he looked him up and down with an indignant stare, the man remaining before him upright and motionless as a post:—

"Well! Pierre Munier," said he, "can't you hear, or must you be told twice over, that this is not your place and that you are not wanted here?"

Pierre with his strong right hand might have crushed at a blow the man who spoke thus; but instead of this, he made no reply, only raised his head with a scared look, and, meeting the looks of his

questioner, turned away his own in confusion.

This added fuel to the other's anger, and still further roused the man's insolence.

"Come! What are you doing there?" he asked, giving him a push with his open hand.

"Monsieur de Malmédie," answered Munier, "I had hoped that on a day like this difference of colour would disappear in face of the common danger."

"You hoped!" said the Major shrugging his shoulders with a loud chuckle. "You hoped! and what gave you this hope, if you please?"

"The desire that I have to die, if needs be, to save our Island."

"*Our* Island!" muttered the Major, "*our* Island. Because these fellows have plantations like us, they fancy the Island belongs to them."

"The Island belongs to us no more than to you white gentlemen, I am well aware," replied Munier in a timid voice, "but if we stay for such questions at the hour of fighting, it will soon be no longer either yours or ours."

"Enough!" said the Major, stamping his foot to impose silence both by gesture and voice on his interlocutor. "Enough! Are you in command of the National Guard?"

"No, sir, as you very well know," answered Munier; "for when I presented myself, you rejected me."

"Then what do you want?"

"I wanted to follow you as a volunteer."

"Impossible," said the Major.

"Why impossible? Ah! if you would only let me, Mons. de Malmédie."

"Impossible," repeated the Major drawing himself up. "These gentlemen who are under my orders will have no mulattos among them."

"No, no blacks," shouted the National Guards with one voice.

"But may I not fight them, sir?" said Munier, letting his arms fall dejectedly by his sides, and with difficulty keeping back the large tears which trembled on his eyelashes.

"Form a corps of coloured men and put yourself at their head, or join this detachment of blacks which is going to follow us."

"But—" murmured Pierre.

"I order you to quit the battalion; order it," repeated M. de Malmédie, bridling up.

"Come, father, come, and leave these men who are insulting you," said a small voice trembling with anger. And Pierre felt himself pulled back with such force that he retreated a step.

"Yes! Jacques, yes, I will follow you," said he.

"It is not Jacques, father, it is I, Georges."

Munier turned in astonishment.

It was, in fact, the child who had got down from the negro's arms, and come to give his father this lesson in dignity.

Munier let his head sink on his breast, and uttered a deep sigh. During this time the ranks of the National Guard had reformed, M. de Malmédie resumed his post at the head of the first file, and the regiment set off at increased speed.

Pierre Munier remained alone between his two children, one of whom was red as fire, the other pale as death. He glanced at the red face of Jacques and Georges' pale one, and as if these symptoms were a double reproach to him, exclaimed:—"What would you have, my poor children?—there is no help for it." Jacques was indifferent and philosophical. The first feeling had been painful to him, no doubt; but reflection had come quickly to his aid and consoled him.

"Bah!" he replied to his father, snapping his fingers. "What does it matter to us after all if this silly man despises us? We are richer than he, aren't we, father? And for myself," he added, casting a side glance at the child with the scalloped collar, "let me find his cub of a Henri at a lucky moment, and I will give him a drubbing which he will remember."

"Good, Jacques!" said Pierre Munier, thanking his eldest son for having in some degree relieved his shame by his careless attitude. Then he turned to his younger son, to see if the latter would take the matter as philosophically as the elder.

But Georges remained motionless: all that his father could discover in his stony countenance was an imperceptible smile which contracted his lips: still, imperceptible as it was, that smile had such a suggestion of contempt and pity that, as we sometimes reply to words that have not been uttered, Pierre answered to this smile:—

"But what do you want me to do then?"

And he waited for the child's answer, disquieted by that vague uneasiness which

we never confess to ourselves, but which, however, disturbs us when we await, from an inferior, whom we fear in spite of ourselves, his opinion of something we have done.

Georges made no reply; but turning his head towards the extremity of the Great Square, said:—

"Father, the negroes down there are waiting for a leader."

"Why, you are right, Georges!" cried Jacques joyously, already consoled for his humiliation by the consciousness of his strength, and reasoning, no doubt, as Cæsar did,—It is better to command these than to obey those.

And Munier, yielding to the advice given by his youngest son and the impetus imparted by the other, advanced towards the negroes, who, engaged in discussing whom to choose as their leader, no sooner perceived the man whom all coloured people in the island looked up to as a father, than they grouped themselves round him as their natural chief, and begged him to lead them to battle.

Then a strange change took place in the man. That feeling of inferiority, which he could not overcome in presence of the whites, disappeared and gave way to a proper estimation of his own merit; his bowed frame drew itself up to its full height; his eyes, which he had kept humbly lowered or wandering vaguely before M. de Malmédie, darted fire; his voice, trembling a moment earlier, assumed an accent of formidable sternness, and it was with a gesture of noble energy that, throwing back his carbine slung over his shoulder, he drew his sword, and, extending his sinewy arm towards the enemy, cried "Forward!"

Then, taking a last look at his youngest child, who had returned to the protection of the negro in the blue suit and, filled with pride and pleasure, was clapping his hands, Pierre disappeared with his black company round the corner of the same street by which the Regulars and National Guards had just disappeared, shouting once again to the negro in the blue jacket:—"Télémaque, look after my son!"

The line of defence consisted of three divisions. On the left the Fanfaron bastion, situated on the edge of the sea and armed with eighteen cannon; in the centre the entrenchment, properly so called, lined with twenty-four field guns;



and, on the right, the Dumas battery, protected by six guns only.

The victorious enemy, after having advanced at first in three columns on the three different points, abandoned the two first, the strength of which they perceived, so as to concentrate upon the third, which was not only, as has been said, the weakest, but which further was only defended by the National Artillery. However, contrary to all expectation, at the sight of the compact mass which marched on them with the terrible regularity of British discipline, this martial band of young men, instead of being alarmed, ran to their posts, manœuvring with the speed and the skill of veteran soldiers, with a fire so well maintained and directed that the enemy thought themselves mistaken as to the strength of the battery and the men who served it; still, they continued to advance, for the deadlier the battery became, the more imperative it was to silence its fire. But then the confounded battery got angry, and like a juggler who makes us forget one astounding trick by performing another still more astounding, it redoubled its volleys, making shot follow grape, and grape common shot, with such rapidity that disorder began to spread in the hostile ranks. At the same time, and as the British had come within musket-shot, the rifle discharge in its turn began to splutter, so that the enemy, seeing their ranks thinned by cannon shot and whole files swept away by musket fire, astonished by a resistance as vigorous as it was unexpected, wavered and drew back.

By order of the General in command the Regulars and the National Battalion who had combined on the threatened point now moved off, one to the left, the other to the right, and charged with fixed bayonets on the enemy's flanks, while the formidable battery continued to pound him in front. The Regulars carried out their manœuvre with their customary precision, fell upon the British, cut through their ranks and increased the disorder. But, whether carried away by their courage, or that they executed the given order clumsily, the National Guards, commanded by M. de Malmédie, instead of falling upon the left flank and making an attack parallel to that executed by the Regulars, made a wrong movement and encountered the British front. Consequently the battery was obliged to cease

firing, and as it was this fire especially that frightened the enemy, who now had only to deal with men inferior in number to themselves, they regained courage and turned on the Nationals, who, to their credit be it said, sustained the shock without giving way a single yard. However, this resistance could not last on the part of these brave fellows placed between an enemy better disciplined than themselves and ten times superior in numbers, and the battery which was forced to be silent to avoid overwhelming them; at each moment they lost so many men that they began to give way. Soon, by a skilful movement, the British left outflanked the right of the National Battalion now on the point of being surrounded and who, too inexperienced to adopt the formation in square, were looked upon as lost. The British, in fact, continued their progressive movement and, like a rising tide were about to surround this island of men with their waves, when suddenly shouts of "France! France!" resounded in the rear of the enemy. This was followed by a fearful discharge, succeeded by a silence more dreadful than the discharge itself.

A strange undulation passed through the enemy's rear and was felt even in their front ranks; red-coats bent under a vigorous bayonet charge like ripe ears beneath the mower's sickle; it was now their turn to be surrounded, to have to face front, right and left. But the newly-arrived reinforcement gave them no respite, but kept on charging, so that at the end of ten minutes they had opened a path through a bloody gap to the unlucky battalion and extricated it. Then, seeing that they had accomplished their object, the new arrivals fell back, wheeled to the left with a circular movement, and charged the enemy's flank. Malmédie, on his side, imitating instinctively the same manœuvre, had given a similar impulse to his battalion, so that the battery, seeing itself unmasked, lost no time, and bursting forth once more aided the efforts of this triple attack, belching torrents of grape-shot on the enemy. From this point victory decided in favour of the French.

Then Malmédie, feeling himself out of danger, glanced at his liberators, whom he had already partly seen, but hesitated to acknowledge, so much did it go against the grain to owe his safety to such men. It was, indeed, the corps of blacks, so despised by him, that had followed in his



wake and joined him at such an opportune moment, and at their head Pierre Munier, who, seeing Malmédie surrounded by the British who thus presented their backs to him, had with his three hundred men caught them in the rear and overthrown them; it was Munier who, after having planned this movement with the genius of a general, had carried it out with the courage of a soldier, and who at this moment finding himself in a position where he need fear nothing except death, fought in front of all, erect at his full height, his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilated, his forehead bare, his hair floating in the wind, enthusiastic, daring, sublime. In short, it was Munier's voice that was raised from time to time in the midst of the fighting, drowning all the noise of battle to shout "Forward!"

Then, as to follow him was to advance, and as the disorder in the British ranks increased, the cry was heard "Comrades, make for the flag!" He was seen to hurl himself into the midst of a group of British, fall, spring up again, plunge into their ranks, and after an instant reappear with torn clothes and bleeding forehead, but with the flag in his hand.

At this moment the General, fearing that the victors might advance too far in pursuit of the British and fall into a trap, gave the order to fall back. The Regulars obeyed first, bringing in the prisoners, the National Guard carrying away the dead; the black Volunteers in the rear, surrounding their flag.

The whole island had rushed to the port, crowding to see the victors, for the inhabitants of Port-Louis thought in their ignorance that the entire army of the enemy had been engaged, and hoped that the British, after being repulsed so vigorously, would not return to the charge, so, as each corps passed, they were greeted with fresh hurrahs!; all were proud, all victorious, all beside themselves. An unexpected happiness fills their hearts, an unhopèd for success turns their heads; the inhabitants had expected to make some resistance, but not to gain a victory: so, when they saw victory so completely and entirely theirs, men, women, veterans and children swore with one mouth that they would work at the entrenchments and die, if needs be, for their defence. Excellent promises, no doubt, and made by all with the intention of keeping them, but not worth, by a great deal, an extra

regiment, if an extra regiment could have arrived!

But, amid this general ovation, no object attracted so much notice as the British flag and the man who had taken it; there were endless cries of astonishment round Munier and his trophy, to which the blacks replied by blustering remarks, while their leader, becoming once more the humble mulatto with whom we are acquainted, satisfied the questions put by each with a timid politeness. Standing near the conqueror, and leaning on his double-barrelled gun, which had not been dumb during the engagement and the bayonet of which was stained with blood, Jacques carried his head proudly, while Georges, who had escaped from Télémaque and joined his father at the port, convulsively clasped his powerful hand and vainly tried to check the tears of joy which fell from his eyes in spite of himself. Close by Munier was M. de Malmédie, no less curled and bedecked than when he started, but with his tie torn, his frill in rags and covered with sweat and dirt; he, too, was surrounded and congratulated by his family; but the congratulations he received were such as are offered to a man who has escaped a danger, not the praises lavished on a victor. So he appeared rather embarrassed by the chorus of affecting solicitude, and, to put a good face on it, was asking loudly where his son Henri and his negro Bijou were, when he saw them both appear making their way through the crowd, Henri to throw himself into his father's arms, and Bijou to congratulate his master.

At this moment, some one came to tell Munier that a negro who had fought under him and received a mortal wound, having been carried to a house near the port, wished to see him. Pierre looked round in search of Jacques to entrust him with his flag, but Jacques had discovered his friend the dog again, who in his turn had come with the rest to offer his compliments; he had placed his gun on the ground, and the child getting the better of the man, he and the dog were rolling over and over, some fifty yards off. Georges, seeing his father's difficulty, stretched out his hand, saying:—

"Give it me, father; I will take care of it for you."

Pierre smiled, and believing that none would dare to touch the glorious trophy which belonged to him alone, kissed

Georges on the forehead, handed him the flag, which the child with great difficulty held upright by clasping his hands on his breast, and went off to the house where the sufferings of one of his Volunteers claimed his presence.

Georges remained alone; but the child felt instinctively that, though alone, he was not isolated; his father's fame protected him, and his eyes beaming with pride he looked at the crowd that surrounded him; this bright and happy glance then met that of the child with the embroidered collar, and became disdainful. The latter, on his part, eyed Georges with envy, asking himself no doubt why his father too had not taken a flag. This question naturally led him doubtless to say to himself, that, failing a flag of his own, he must monopolise another's. For, rudely approaching Georges, who, though he saw his hostile purpose, did not draw back a step, he said:—

"Give me that."

"What?" asked Georges.

"That flag," replied Henri.

"This flag is not yours, it's my father's."

"What has that got to do with me? I want it!"

"You shall not have it."

The child with the embroidered collar then put out his hand to snatch the staff of the flag, an action to which Georges only replied by tightening his lips, becoming paler than usual, and drawing back a step. But this act only encouraged Henri, who, like all spoilt children, thought he had but to ask to get; he stepped forward, and this time laid his plans so well that he grasped the stick, shouting loudly with his little angry voice:—

"I tell you I want it."

"And I tell you you shan't have it," repeated Georges, pushing him back with one hand, while with the other he continued to press the captured flag against his chest.

"Ah! you nigger, you! how dare you touch me?" cried Henri. "Well, you will see." And, drawing his little sword from the scabbard before Georges had time to defend himself, he struck him with all his strength on the top of the forehead. The blood at once gushed from the wound and trickled down the boy's face.

"Coward!" said Georges coldly.

Exasperated by this insult, Henri was about to repeat the blow, when Jacques,

reaching his brother at one bound, sent the aggressor flying ten yards by a vigorous blow in the middle of his face, and, jumping on the sword which the latter had let fall in the struggle, broke it into three or four pieces, spat on it, and tossed the pieces at him.

It was now the turn of the boy with the embroidered collar to feel the blood run down his face, but *he* had lost his blood not from a sword blow, but from a blow with the fist.

All this had passed so rapidly that neither M. de Malmédie, who, as we have said, was engaged a few yards off in receiving the congratulations of his family, nor Munier, who was coming from the house where the negro had just breathed his last, had time to anticipate it. They were merely spectators of the catastrophe, and ran up both at once; Pierre panting, troubled and trembling; Malmédie red with anger and choking with arrogance. They met in front of Georges.

"Did you see," cried M. de Malmédie, "what happened just now?"

"Alas! yes, M. de Malmédie," answered Pierre, "and, believe me, had I been there, this would not have taken place."

"Meanwhile, sir," cried M. de Malmédie, "your son laid his hand on mine. A mulatto's son has dared to touch a white man's son."

"I am distressed at what has just taken place, M. de Malmédie," stammered the poor father, "and humbly offer my apologies."

"Your apologies, sir," replied the angry settler, bridling up as the other humbled himself; "do you think your apologies are sufficient?"

"What more can I do, sir?"

"What can you do?" repeated Malmédie, himself at a loss to name the satisfaction he wished to obtain; "you can have that wretch who struck my son whipped."

"Have me whipped?" said Jacques, picking up his double-barrelled gun and changing from child to man again. "Well, come and meddle with me yourself, M. de Malmédie."

"Hush! Jacques; hush, my son," cried Pierre.

"Excuse me, father," said Jacques, "but I am right, and I will not be silent. M. Henri struck my brother, who was doing nothing to him, with his sword;



and I struck M. Henri with my fist. So M. Henri is wrong, and I am right."

"Struck my son with his sword, my Georges. Georges, dear child," cried Munier, going towards his son, "is it true that you are wounded?"

"It's nothing, father," said Georges.

"What! nothing?" cried Pierre Munier; "why! your forehead is cut open. Look, sir," he resumed, turning to M. de Malmédie, "Jacques spoke the truth; your son has almost killed mine."

Malmédie turned towards Henri, and, as there was no means of resisting the evidence, inquired:—

"Come, Henri, how did the thing happen?"

"Papa," said Henri, "it is not my fault; I wanted the flag to bring it to you, and that wretch wouldn't give it me."

"And why wouldn't you give my son the flag, you little rascal?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"Because the flag isn't yours, or your son's, or anybody's, but my father's."

"Well?" asked Malmédie, continuing to question his son.

"Well, when I saw he wouldn't give it me, I tried to take it. Then this brute came up and struck me in the face with his fist."

"Then that is what happened?"

"Yes, father."

"He is lying," said Jacques, "and I only struck him when I saw my brother's blood flowing; but for that, I should never have hit him."

"Silence, you villain!" cried M. de Malmédie. Then going up to Georges, he said:—

"Give me the flag."

But Georges, instead of obeying this order, stepped back once more, pressing the flag to his breast with all his might.

"Give me the flag," repeated Malmédie in a threatening tone which showed that, if his demand were not complied with, he would resort to the utmost extremities.

"But, sir," muttered Pierre, "it was I who took the flag from the British."

"I know it, sir, but it shall not be said that a mulatto has coped with a man like me with impunity. Give me the flag."

"But, sir"—

"I will have it, I order it; obey your officer."

It entered Pierre's head to answer, "You are not my officer, sir, since you wouldn't have me as your soldier"; but

the words died upon his lips; his habitual humility got the better of his courage. He sighed; and though obedience to such an unjust order grieved him, he himself took the flag from Georges, who ceased to offer any resistance, and handed it to the Major, who walked off laden with his stolen trophy.

It was incredible, strange, miserable, to see a man of a nature so rich, vigorous and determined, yield without resistance to that other nature so vulgar, dull, mean, common and poor, yet so it was; and, what is still more extraordinary, the thing surprised nobody, for it happened every day in the colonies, not in similar, but in parallel circumstances. So, accustomed from infancy to respect the white as men of a superior race, Munier had all his life let himself be crushed by that aristocracy of colour to which he had just yielded once more without even attempting to resist. He resembles those heroes who hold their heads high in the face of grape shot, and bend the knee to a prejudice. The lion attacks man, the terrestrial image of God, and flees in alarm when he hears the cock crow.

As for Georges, who had not shed a tear when he saw his blood trickling down, he burst into sobs on finding his hands empty in presence of his father, who looked at him sadly without even trying to comfort him.

Jacques, for his part, bit his fists with rage, and vowed to be avenged one day on Henri, M. de Malmédie and all the whites.

Scarcely ten minutes after the scene which we have just related, a messenger covered with dust rushed up announcing that the British, to the number of ten thousand, were advancing by the Williams plains and the Little River; then, almost immediately, the look-out signalled the arrival of a fresh British squadron which, anchoring in the bay of Grande-Rivière, landed five thousand men on the coast. Finally, it was ascertained at the same time that the division repulsed in the morning had rallied on the banks of the Rivière des Lataniers, and was ready to march again upon Port Louis, combining its movements with the two other invading corps who were advancing, one by Curtois Bay, the other by the Réduit. There were no means of resisting such a force; so, when some despairing voices, appealing to the oath



taken in the morning to conquer or die, demanded fight, the Captain-General replied by disbanding the National Guard and the Volunteers, and declaring that, armed with full powers from his Majesty the Emperor Napoleon, he was about to treat with the British for the surrender of the town.

Only madmen could have tried to combat such a step; twenty-five thousand men surrounded less than four thousand; accordingly, on the order of the Captain-General every one went home, so that the town remained occupied only by the Regulars. On the night of the 2nd of December the capitulation was concluded and signed; at five a.m. it was approved and exchanged; the same day the enemy occupied the lines; on the morrow he took possession of the town and harbour.

Eight hours afterwards the captured French squadron left the harbour under full sail, carrying the whole of the garrison, like a poor family driven from the paternal roof; so long as the last flutter of the last flag could be seen, the crowd remained on the quay; but when the last frigate had disappeared, every one went home in gloom and silence. Two men remained alone and were the last to leave the harbour, the mulatto Pierre Munier and the negro Télémaque.

"M. Munier, we will climb the hill; we shall still be able to see Masters Jacques and Georges."

"Yes, you are right, my good Télémaque," cried Pierre Munier, "and if we do not see *them*, we shall at least see the ship that carries them."

And Pierre Munier, dashing off with the rapidity of a young man, in an instant had climbed the hill of the Discovery, from the height of which he could follow with his eyes, until it grew dark, not his *sons*, for the distance, as he had foreseen, was too great for him to distinguish them any longer, but the frigate Bellona on board which they had embarked.

In fact, Pierre Munier had resolved, cost him what it might, to sever himself from his children, and was sending them to France under the protection of the worthy General Decaen. Jacques and Georges started then for Paris with recommendations to two or three of the richest merchants in the capital, with whom Pierre Munier had for a long time had business relations. The pretext for

their departure was to get their education. The real cause of their absence was the very evident hatred shown towards both of them by M. de Malinédie since the day of the flag incident, a hatred on account of which their poor father trembled, especially with their known disposition, lest they should become the victims.

As for Henri, his mother was too fond of him to part from him. Besides, what did he want to learn? unless it was that every coloured man was born to respect and obey him.

Well! as we have seen, that was a thing Henri had already learned by heart.

## CHAPTER IV

### FOURTEEN YEARS LATER

THE day when a European vessel is signalled off the port is a general holiday in the Isle of France; for, long severed from the mother country, the majority of the inhabitants impatiently await news of their country, their families, and those beyond the seas; each hopes for something, and keeps his eyes fixed, directly she comes in sight, upon the maritime messenger which brings him the letter or the portrait of a friend, male or female, or it may be that friend, himself or herself, in person. For this vessel, the object of so many desires and the source of so many hopes, is the over-sea chain joining Europe to Africa, the flying-bridge thrown from one world to the other. Accordingly, no news spreads so rapidly through the whole Island as that which issues from the peak of the Discovery, "A vessel in sight!"

We say the peak of the Discovery, because in almost all cases the vessel, obliged to keep away to catch the east wind, passes in front of Grand-Port, coasts along the land at the distance of two or three leagues, doubles the point of Quatre-Cocos, steers between the Ile Plate and the Coin-de-Mire, and some hours after, having cleared this passage, appears at the entrance of Port-Louis, whose inhabitants, warned the previous day by the signals which have traversed the Island

to announce its approach, await it in crowds that throng the quay.

After what has been said of the eagerness with which every one in the Isle of France awaits news from Europe, you will doubtless not be astonished at the crowd which one fine morning in the end of February 1824, about eleven in the morning, assembled at every point from which they could see the entry into the harbour of Port-Louis of the Leicester, a fine frigate of thirty-six guns, which had been signalled the day before at two in the afternoon.

We ask the reader's permission to introduce to him, or rather to renew his acquaintance with, two of the persons whom she carried on her deck.

The one was a man with fair hair, light complexion, blue eyes, regular features, and calm expression, a little above middle height, whom you would have set down as no more than thirty or thirty-two, but who was really more than forty. At first sight you saw nothing specially striking about him, though it must also be confessed his general appearance was very agreeable. If, after the first glance, you had any reason to continue the inspection, you remarked that he had small and beautifully shaped hands and feet, which in all countries, but especially in England, is a sign of good family. His voice was clear and distinct, but without modulation, and so to speak, unmusical. His sky-blue eyes, which might in ordinary circumstances be charged with want of expression, wandered with a clear glance which seemed to fasten on nothing in particular and to examine nothing deeply. From time to time, however, he blinked his eyes like one tired of the sunshine, accompanying this movement with a slight parting of the lips which exposed a double row of small, well-set teeth, white as pearls. This trick seemed to deprive his face of what little expression it possessed; but, on looking at him carefully, you noticed, on the contrary, that it was at such moments that his quick and profound glance, darting a ray of fire between his contracted eyelids, probed the thought of his questioner to the very depths of his soul. Those who saw him for the first time seldom failed to take him for a man of no parts; he knew that this was, in general, the superficial judgment which men formed of him, and almost always, whether designedly or through indiffer-

ence, he was content to leave them in that opinion, quite sure of undeceiving them when it might suit his humour or when the proper moment should arrive. For this deceptive exterior concealed a singularly profound mind, just as sometimes two inches of snow will mask a precipice of a thousand feet; so, with the consciousness of an almost universal superiority, he waited patiently till it was given the opportunity to triumph. Then, when he met with an opinion opposed to his own, and, in the person giving vent to that opinion, a foeman worthy of his steel, he caught up the conversation which he had allowed to stray into a hundred capricious bye-ways, gradually became animated and opened out, growing, as it were, to his full height; for his harsh voice and blazing eyes ably supported his lively, incisive, and highly coloured speech, at once enticing and serious, dazzling and practical. If on the contrary this opportunity did not occur, he was quite satisfied, and continued to be looked upon by those who surrounded him as a commonplace person. Not that he lacked self-esteem; on the contrary, he pushed his pride in certain matters to excess. But it was a plan of conduct imposed on himself, from which he never swerved. Every time that an erroneous proposition, a false idea, a badly supported conceit, in short, anything ridiculous, was stated in his presence, the extreme acuteness of his mind brought instantly to his tongue a smart sarcasm or to his lips a scornful smile. But he at once checked this sort of outward irony, and, when he could not entirely suppress the outburst of contempt, he concealed beneath one of those blinkings of the eyes which were habitual to him, the bantering expression which had escaped him in spite of himself, knowing well that the way to see and hear everything was to appear blind and deaf. Perhaps he would have wished, like Pope Sixtus V., to appear paralysed as well; but, as this would have entailed a too lengthy and tiring dissimulation, he had abandoned the idea.

The other was a dark young man of sallow complexion, with long black hair; his eyes, which were large, beautifully formed and velvety, had, behind the apparent softness which was due only to the continual pre-occupation of his thoughts, a firmness of character which struck one from the first. If he became excited,



which was but seldom, for his whole frame seemed to obey not the physical instincts but a moral force, then his eyes lighted up with an inward flame, the fire of which seemed to lie in the depths of his soul. Though the lines of his face seemed clear, they wanted regularity to a certain extent; his harmonious forehead, though vigorous and square in mould, was furrowed by a slight scar, almost imperceptible in the state of calmness which was habitual to him, but which betrayed itself by a white line when his face became red. A moustache, as dark as his hair and as regular as his eyebrows, shaded, while concealing its size, a mouth with strong lips and furnished with splendid teeth. The general aspect of his countenance was serious; by the wrinkles in his forehead, the almost perpetual frowning of the eyebrows, and the severity of all his features, might be recognised a deep reflection and an unshaken resolve. Accordingly, in contrast with his companion, whose features lacked character, and who, though forty years old, appeared scarcely thirty or thirty-two, he, who was hardly twenty-five, appeared nearly thirty. As to the rest of his person, he was of moderate height, but well-built; his limbs were all perhaps a trifle slender, but one felt that, when animated by any excitement, violent tension of nerve would supply them with strength. By way of compensation, one understood that nature had endowed him with activity and dexterity beyond what she had denied him in the way of clumsy vigour. For the rest, dressed almost always with an elegant simplicity, he wore at this moment trousers, waistcoat and frock-coat whose cut showed that they came from the hands of one of the best Parisian tailors, and in the button-hole of his frock-coat he wore, knotted with elegant carelessness, the united ribands of the Legion of Honour and of Charles III.

These two men had met on board the Leicester, which had taken aboard the one at Portsmouth, the other at Cadiz. At the first glance they had recognised the fact that they had already seen each other in the saloons of London and Paris, where one sees everybody; they had greeted each other, therefore, as old acquaintances, but at first without speaking. For, having never been introduced, both had been restrained by that aristocratic reserve of fashionable people who hesitate, even

in special circumstances of life, to break through the general proprieties. However, the loneliness of the deck, the limited space within which they walked every day, the natural attraction two men of the world instinctively feel for one another, had soon brought them together. At first they had exchanged some trifling remarks, then their conversation had assumed a more serious character. After some days, each of the two had recognised his companion as a man out of the common, and congratulated himself at such a meeting on a three months' voyage; then, after further waiting, they had become united by that friendship of circumstances which, without roots in the past, forms a distraction in the present, without creating any complication for the future. Then, during those long evenings under the equator, and fine tropical nights, they had had time to study each other, and both had recognised that in art, science and politics, they had, whether by inquiry or by experience, learnt all that it is given to man to know. Both had then remained constantly face to face like wrestlers of equal strength, and in this long voyage the first of these two men had gained but one single advantage over the second, and that was when in a squall which struck the frigate after doubling the Cape of Good Hope, and in which the captain of the Leicester, injured by the fall of a top-gallant-mast, had been carried swooning into his cabin, the fair-haired passenger had seized the speaking-trumpet, and, springing on the quarter-deck, had, in the absence of the second in command, whom severe illness kept prisoner in his berth, with the firmness of a man accustomed to command and the knowledge of an accomplished sailor, at once issued a series of orders which saved the vessel from succumbing to the force of the hurricane. Then, when the squall was over, his face, shining for a moment with that sublime pride which mounts to the brow of every human creature when struggling against his Creator, had resumed its ordinary expression; his voice, the stentorian tones of which had made themselves heard above the roll of the thunder and the howling of the storm, had sunk to its normal pitch. Lastly, with a gesture as simple as the preceding ones had been romantic and exalted, he had handed the second officer back the speaking-trumpet, that

sceptre of a master mariner which is, in the hands of him who wields it, the token of absolute and undisputed authority.

During all this time, his companion, on whose calm face, let us hasten to say, it would have been impossible to detect the least trace of emotion, had followed him with his eyes with the envious expression of a man obliged to recognise himself as inferior to him whose equal he had hitherto thought himself. Then, when the danger being over, they found themselves side by side again, he had contented himself with saying :

"You have commanded a ship then, my Lord?"

"Yes," the man to whom this title of honour had been applied answered simply; "I have even reached the rank of Com-modore, but six years ago I went into the diplomatic service; and at the moment of danger I recollected my old profession; that is all."

Then there had been no further talk between the two men on the subject; only it was clear that the younger of the two was inwardly humiliated by this superiority which his companion had in such unexpected fashion gained over him, and which he would certainly have known nothing of but for the incident which had in a way forced it into the light of day. The question which we have reported and the answer it evoked show, moreover, that during the three months they had just spent together, neither of these men had asked any question as to their respective social positions; they had recognised each other as brothers in intelligence, and that had been enough for them. They knew that the Isle of France was for both the object of their journey, and they had asked nothing more. Both appeared equally impatient to arrive, for both had given orders to be told the moment the Island came in view. The order was needless in the case of one of them, for the young man with dark hair was on deck, leaning against the taffrail of the poop, when the look-out man gave the cry, always so spirit-stirring, even to sailors, of "Land ho!"

At this cry, his companion appeared at the top of the companion, and, advancing towards the young man with a step more rapid than usual, came and leant beside him.

"Well, my Lord," said the latter, "we have arrived, so at least they assure us; for I confess to my shame that I have

scanned the horizon without observing anything but a sort of haze which may quite as well be a mist floating on the sea as an island that has its roots at the bottom of the ocean."

"Yes, I daresay," said the elder man, "for it is only with difficulty that even the sailor's eye can distinguish with certainty, especially at such a distance, water from sky, and land from clouds; but I," he added, blinking his eyes, "old sea dog that I am, perceive all the outlines of our Island, I might even say all its details."

"Well, my Lord, that is a fresh superiority I recognise in your Lordship over myself; but I assure you it requires that to assure me of such a thing, so as not to reject it as incredible."

"Then take my glass," said the sailor, "while I with the naked eye will describe the coast to you; will you believe me then?"

"My Lord," said the doubter, "I consider you in everything a man so superior to others that I believe what you tell me, you may rest assured, without your needing to add any proof to your words. If I take the glass which you offer me, it is rather to satisfy a longing of my heart than a desire of my curiosity."

"Come, come," said the fair-haired man, laughing; "I see that the land air is taking its effect, you are becoming a flatterer."

"I a flatterer, my Lord?" said the young man shaking his head. "Oh! your Lordship is mistaken. The Leicester, I assure you, might make a voyage further than from pole to pole and sail round the world more than once before you would see me so changed. No, my Lord, I do not flatter you, I only thank you for the gracious kindness you have shown me throughout this interminable voyage, I will venture almost to say the friendship which your Lordship has evidenced towards an unknown person like me."

"My dear comrade," answered the Englishman, holding out his hand to the young man, "I hope that for you as for me there are no people in the world 'unknown' except vulgarians, fools, and rogues; but I hope also that for the one as for the other of us every superior man is a relation whom we recognise as belonging to our family, wherever we meet him. That granted, a truce to compliments, my young friend; take these glasses and look; for we are drawing near so rapidly that there will



soon be no merit in accomplishing the little lesson in geography which I have undertaken to give you."

The young man took the spy-glass and put it to his eye.

"Can you make it out?" asked the Englishman.

"Perfectly," said the young man.

"Do you see on our extreme right, like a cone rising out of the sea, the solitary *Ile Ronde*?"

"Wonderfully clearly."

"Do you see closer to us the *Ile Plate*, below which is passing at this moment a brig, which from her shape has to me all the look of a man-of-war? This evening we shall be where she is, and shall pass where she is passing."

The young man put down the glass and tried to see with the naked eye the objects which his companion made out so easily, and which he himself saw with difficulty by the aid of the telescope he held in his hand. Then he said with a smile of astonishment:—

"It is marvellous!"

And he put up the glass to his eye again.

"Do you see the *Coin-de-Mire*," continued his companion, "which, from here, is almost undistinguishable from Cap Malheureux, of sad and poetic memory? Do you see the *Piton de Bambou*, behind which rises the Mountain of La Faïence? do you see the hill of Grand-Port; and there, do you see on its left the *Morne des Créoles*?"

"Yes, yes, I see it all and recognise it, for all the peaks and summits are familiar to me from childhood, and I have kept them in my memory religiously; but," continued the young man, pushing together with the palm of his hand the three tubes of the spy-glass, "this is not the first time that you have seen this coast, and there is more of memory than of actual sight in the description you have just given me."

"True," said the Englishman, smiling, "and I see that there is no means of practising trickery on you. Yes, I have already seen this coast."

"Yes, I speak to some extent from memory, though the recollections which it has left me are probably less tender than those which it recalls to you. Yes, I came here at a time when, in all probability, we were enemies, my dear companion, for it was fourteen years ago."

"That is just the time when I left the Isle of France," replied the dark-haired young man.

"Were you still there at the time of the sea fight that took place at Grand-Port, and to which I ought not to allude, from a feeling of national pride, considering what a splendid beating we got there?"

"Oh! speak of it, my Lord, speak of it," interrupted the young man; "you have so often taken your revenge, you English, that there is almost pride in your confessing to a defeat."

"Well, that was the time I visited the Island; for I was serving then in the navy."

"As Midshipman, no doubt?"

"As Lieutenant of the frigate, sir."

"But at that time, allow me to say, my Lord, you were a child."

"What age do you put me at, sir?"

"Why, I should think we are nearly of the same age, and you are scarcely thirty."

"I am just forty," replied the Englishman, smiling; "I was quite right in saying just now that you were in a flattering vein."

The young man was astonished, and looked at his companion with more attention than he had hitherto paid him, and noticed, by the slight wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and mouth, that he might actually be the age he declared himself, and which he was so far from appearing to be. Then, leaving his investigation to return to the question which had been put to him, he went on:—

"Yes, yes, I remember that battle and also another which took place at the opposite end of the island—Do you know Port-Louis, my Lord?"

"No, sir, I only know this side of the coast. I was dangerously wounded at the battle of Grand-Port, and carried as prisoner to Europe. Since that time I have not revisited the Indian seas, where I shall now probably make an indefinite stay."

Then, as though the last words that they had exchanged had just aroused in the two men a source of inward memories, each moved away mechanically and disappeared to meditate in silence, one at the bows, the other at the stern.

It was the day after this conversation that, having rounded the *Ile d'Ambre* and passed at the predicted hour at the foot of the *Ile Plate*, the frigate *Leicester*, as we

pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, made her entrance into the harbour of Port-Louis, in the midst of the customary crowd which welcomed the arrival of every European vessel.

Of course, the fair-haired Englishman was no other than Lord Murray, member of the Upper House, who after being in turn sailor and ambassador, had just been nominated Governor of the Isle of France by His Britannic Majesty.

We invite the reader, then, to recognise in him the young lieutenant of whom he got a glimpse on board the Nereïd, lying at the feet of his uncle, Captain Willoughby, wounded in the side by a discharge of grape, and of whom we announced not only the recovery, but also the approaching re-appearance as one of the chief characters of our story.

At the moment of separating from his companion, Lord Murray turned to him and said :—

“By-the-bye, sir, in three days I am giving a banquet to the authorities of the Island; I hope that you will do me the honour of being one of my guests.”

“With the greatest pleasure, my Lord,” answered the young man; “but, before I accept, it is right that I should tell your Lordship who I am.”

“Your name will be announced when you come in, sir,” replied Lord Murray, “and then I shall know who you are; meanwhile, I know what you are worth, and that is all I want.”

Then, giving his travelling companion a shake of the hand and a smile, the new Governor passed down with the Captain to the barge of honour, which shoved off from the ship’s side, and impelled by the arms of ten stout oarsmen, soon landed at the fountain of the Chien-de-Plomb.

As the Governor landed, a Guard of Honour presented arms, the drums beat a salute, the guns of the forts and the frigate roared simultaneously, and those of the other ships answered them like an echo; immediately universal shouts of “Long live Lord Murray!” joyously welcomed the new Governor, who, after graciously saluting those who gave him this honourable reception, went off to his palace, surrounded by the chief authorities of the Island. And yet, these men who thus fêted the representative of His Britannic Majesty and applauded his arrival, were the same men who had formerly lamented the departure of the French. But fourteen

years, it is true, had elapsed since that time; the older generation had partly disappeared, and the new generation only cherished the recollection of the past in ostentation, and as one cherishes an old family pedigree. Fourteen years had elapsed, as we have already said, and that is more than are required in order to forget the death of one’s best friend, to violate an oath sworn; more than are required, in short, for killing, burying, or changing the name of a great man or a great nation.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRODIGAL SON

ALL eyes had followed Lord Murray to Government House; but, when the door of the palace had closed on him and those who surrounded him, all eyes were directed to the ship.

At this moment the young man with dark hair disembarked in his turn, and the curiosity of which the Governor had just been the object, was transferred to him. As a matter of fact, they had seen Lord Murray talking graciously to him and shaking his hand; so that the assembled crowd decided, with its usual sagacity, that this stranger was some young nobleman belonging to the aristocracy of France or England. This probability had changed to an absolute certainty at the sight of the double riband which adorned his button-hole, one of which ribands, it must be confessed, was a little less widely distributed at that period than it is to-day. For the rest, the inhabitants of Port-Louis had time to examine the new arrival; for, after casting his eyes around him as though he had expected to find some of his friends or relations on the pier, he had waited on the quay while the Governor’s horses were being disembarked; then, when this operation was over, a servant of a tawny complexion, dressed in the costume of the African Moors, with whom the stranger had exchanged some words in an unknown tongue, saddled two horses in Arabian fashion, and leading both of them by their bridles, for their legs, stiffened by long confinement, could not yet



be trusted, followed his master who had already started on foot towards the street, looking all round him as though he had expected a friendly face to appear suddenly amid all these, to him, unmeaning countenances.

Among the groups awaiting the strangers at the spot characteristically known as *La Pointe-aux-Blagueurs* or "Idlers' Corner," was one in the midst of which stood a man of from fifty to fifty-four, with hair that was turning grey, common features, rasping voice, and pointed whiskers which joined the corner of his mouth on either side, together with a handsome young fellow of twenty-five or six. The elder was dressed in a frock-coat of maroon merino, nankeen trousers and a waistcoat of white piqué. The younger man, whose features were a little more marked than those of his neighbour, but still bore such a resemblance to them that it was clear these two individuals were connected by the closest ties of relationship, wore a grey hat, a silk handkerchief knotted carelessly about his neck, and white waistcoat and trousers.

"My word, there's a nice-looking young fellow," said the stout man looking at the stranger who was passing close to him at the moment, "and if he is going to remain in the Island, I advise the husbands and mothers to look after their wives and daughters."

"That's a fine horse," said the young man, putting an eyeglass in his eye, "of the very purest Arab blood, if I am not mistaken; an Arab of the Arabs."

"Do you know this gentleman, Henri?" asked the stout man.

"No, father, but if he wants to sell his horse, I know who will give him a thousand dollars for it."

"And that is Henri de Malmédie, is it not, my son? and, if you like the horse, you will do well to indulge your fancy for it; you can afford it, you are rich."

No doubt the stranger heard Henri's offer and the approval given it by his father, for his lip curled contemptuously as he gave father and son alternately a haughty glance that was not without menace; then, better informed, no doubt, as regards them than they were about him, he passed on murmuring, "Those people again! there's no escaping them!"

"What does that dandy want with

us?" asked M. de Malmédie of those who surrounded him.

"I don't know, father," answered Henri; "but the first time we meet him, if he looks at us in the same fashion, I promise you I'll ask him."

"Why, Henri," said M. de Malmédie with an air of pity for the stranger's ignorance, "the poor young fellow does not know who we are."

"Well, then, I will teach him," murmured Henri.

During this interval the stranger, whose look of contempt had aroused this threatening dialogue, had continued his way to the Rampart without showing any uneasiness at the impression which his passing had produced, and without condescending to turn round to see its effect. When he had gone about a third of the way along the *Jardin de la Compagnie*, his attention was attracted by a group of persons standing on a small bridge which connected the garden with the courtyard of a fine-looking house. In the centre of this group was a charming girl of fifteen or sixteen, and the stranger, who was no doubt a man of artistic tastes and therefore a lover of beauty in all forms, stopped in order to get a better look at her. Although she was at her very door-step, the girl, who no doubt belonged to one of the wealthiest families in the Island, was accompanied by a European governess, evidently an Englishwoman, from her long fair hair and the clearness of her skin, while an old grey-haired negro in a suit of white dimity held himself in readiness, with eyes fixed on his young mistress, and foot uplifted, so to speak, to carry out her slightest orders.

Perhaps, too, as everything is heightened by contrast, her beauty, which we have described as wonderful, was increased still further by the ugliness of the person who stood dumb and motionless in front of her, and with whom she was endeavouring to enter into business negotiations in respect of one of those charming fans of carved ivory, transparent and fragile as lace work.

The man who was talking to her was bony in frame, of a yellow complexion, with eyes raised at the corners, and a broad-brimmed straw hat on his head, from which hung, like a sample of the hair with which the skull that it shaded was presumably covered, a long plait which

came down to the middle of his back ; he was dressed in blue cotton drawers, reaching to his knees, and a blouse of the same material coming half-way down his thighs. At his feet was a bamboo cane, six feet in length, supporting at each of its extremities a basket, the weight of which made this long cane bend like a bow when its middle rested on the dealer's shoulders. These baskets were filled with the numerous little knick-knacks which alike in the colonies as in France, in the open-air bazaars of the tropics as in the elegant shops of Alphonse Giroux and Susse, turn the heads of girls and sometimes even of their mothers. Well, as we have said, the beautiful Creole, in the midst of all these wonders spread out on a mat stretched at her feet, had stopped for a moment at a fan representing houses, pagodas, and impossible palaces, dogs, lions, and fantastic birds ; in short, a thousand figures of men, animals and buildings that had no existence save in the very lively imagination of the inhabitant of Canton and Pekin. She was asking then purely and simply the price of this fan. But there lay the difficulty. The Chinaman, who had landed only a few days before, didn't know a single word of French, English, or Italian, and this ignorance was clearly responsible for his failure to reply to the question which had been put to him in these three languages successively. This ignorance was already so well known in the colony that the inhabitant of the banks of the Yellow River was alluded to at Port-Louis merely by the name of Miko-Miko, the only two words which he uttered while going along the streets of the town, carrying his long bamboo loaded with baskets, first on one shoulder, then on the other, and which in all probability meant "Buy, buy." The relationship hitherto established between Miko-Miko and his customers was purely and simply that of gestures and signs. As the beautiful girl had never had occasion to make a profound study of the language of the Abbé de l'Epée, she found it absolutely impossible to understand Miko-Miko or to make herself understood by him.

It was at this moment that the stranger approached her. "Excuse me, Mademoiselle," he began, "but, seeing you are in a difficulty, I presume to offer you my services : can I be of use to you in any way, and will you condescend to employ me as interpreter ?"

"Oh ! Monsieur," replied the governess, while the young girl's cheeks were covered with a layer of the finest pink, "I am grateful a thousand times for your offer, for Mademoiselle Sara and myself have in the last ten minutes exhausted our philological knowledge without succeeding in making this man understand us. We have spoken to him by turns in French, English and Italian, and he has answered to none of those languages."

"Perhaps Monsieur is acquainted with some language that this man can speak, Henrietta dear," said the young girl ; "and I want this fan so much that, if Monsieur succeeds in finding out the price, he will have done me a real service."

"But you see it is impossible," answered Henrietta ; "the man talks no language."

"At least he talks that of the country where he was born," said the stranger.

"Yes, but he is a Chinaman ; and who can speak Chinese ?"

The stranger smiled, and, turning to the dealer, spoke some words in a foreign tongue.

We should try in vain to describe the astonishment that came over the features of poor Miko-Miko, when the accents of his mother tongue sounded in his ears like the echo of distant music. He dropped the fan which he held, and, staring open-mouthed at the man who had just addressed him, seized his hand and kissed it several times ; then, as the stranger repeated the question that he had already put to him, he at last decided to answer. But it was with an expression in his look and a tone of voice that formed one of the strangest contrasts imaginable ; for with the most affected and sentimental air possible he told him quite simply the price of the fan.

"It is twenty pounds sterling, Mademoiselle," said the stranger, turning to the girl, "about ninety dollars."

"A thousand thanks, sir," answered Sara, blushing once more. Then, turning to her governess, "Is it not really most fortunate, dear Henrietta," she went on in English, "that Monsieur speaks this man's language ?"

"And also most surprising," said Henrietta.

"And yet it is very simple, ladies," answered the stranger in the same language. "My mother died before I was three months old, and I was given as nurse a



woman from the Island of Formosa, who was in the service of our house. So her language was the first that I prattled, and, though I have not often had occasion to speak it, I have, as you have seen, retained some words, for which I shall congratulate myself all my life, since, thanks to those words I have been able to render you a slight service."

Then, slipping into the Chinaman's hand a Spanish doubloon, and, signing to his servant to follow him, the young man went off, saluting Mademoiselle Sara and her friend Henrietta with perfect grace.

The stranger took the road to Moka; but he had hardly gone a mile on the road leading to Pailles and reached the foot of Discovery Hill, when he suddenly stopped, and his eyes fastened on a bench placed half-way up the ascent, on which was seated an old man perfectly motionless, his hands resting on his knees and his eyes fixed on the sea. For a moment the stranger surveyed this man with a doubtful air; then, as if this hesitation had given way to an absolute conviction, he murmured:

"It is he, I am certain; great heavens! how changed he is!" Then, after looking at the old man with an air of remarkable interest, the young man took a path by which he might approach him without being seen, a plan which he carried out successfully, after stopping twice or thrice on the way and placing his hand on his breast, as if to give a strong emotion time to calm down.

As for the old man, he did not stir at the approach of the stranger, so that it might have been thought that he had not even heard the sound of his step; but this would have been a mistake, for scarcely had the young man sat down upon the same bench than he turned his head towards him and, saluting him in a timid manner, got up and began to walk away.

"Oh! don't disturb yourself for me, sir," said the young man.

The old man at once sat down, no longer in the middle of the seat but at its extremity.

Then a moment's silence ensued between the old man who continued to gaze at the sea, and the stranger who looked at the old man.

At last, after five minutes of silent and deep contemplation, the stranger spoke:—

"Sir," said he to his neighbour, "doubt-

less you were not down at the harbour just now when the Leicester came to anchor there,—about an hour and a half ago?"

"Pardon me, I was not there, sir," answered the old man in a tone of mingled humility and astonishment.

"Then," resumed the young man, "you took no interest in the arrival of this vessel from Europe?"

"Why so, sir?" said the old man with increasing astonishment.

"Because in that case, instead of stopping here, you would have gone like everybody else down to the harbour."

"You are wrong, sir, you are wrong," replied the old man sadly, shaking his white head; "on the contrary I take, I am certain of it, a greater interest than any one in this sight. Every time a ship has arrived, no matter from what country, I have come for fourteen years to see if it does not bring me a letter from my children, or even my children themselves. And, as it would tire me too much to remain standing, I seat myself here in the morning at the same spot from which I saw them depart; and I remain here the whole day until, when every one has gone away, I have given up all hope."

"But why do you not go down yourself to the harbour?" asked the stranger.

"So I did during the first years," replied the old man; "but then I learned my fate too quickly; and, as each fresh disappointment became too painful, I ended by staying here and sending my negro Télémaque in my place. In this way hope lasts longer. If he comes back quickly, I think he brings me word of their arrival; if he is slow in returning, I think he is waiting for a letter. He comes back most times with empty hands. Then I get up and go back alone as I came; I enter my deserted house and pass the night in tears, saying to myself, no doubt it will be the next time."

"Poor father!" murmured the stranger.

"You pity me, sir?" asked the old man with astonishment.

"Certainly, I pity you," answered the young one.

"You do not know then who I am?"

"You are a man, and you suffer."

"But I am a mulatto," answered the old man in a low and profoundly humble tone.

A deep blush passed over the young man's forehead.

"And I, too, sir, am a mulatto," he answered.

"You?" cried the old man.

"Yes," answered the stranger.

"You a mulatto?" and the old man looked with astonishment at the red and blue riband knotted in the stranger's frock-coat. "You a mulatto! Oh! then I am not surprised at your pity. I had taken you for a white; but, since you are a man of colour like myself, it becomes another thing at once; you are a friend, a brother."

"Yes, a friend, a brother," said the stranger extending both his hands to the old man.

Then he murmured under his breath, looking at him with an indescribable expression of tenderness, "and even more than that, perhaps."

"Then I can tell you everything," the old man went on. "Ah! I feel that to speak of my sorrow will do me good. Picture to yourself, sir, that I have, or rather had, for God only knows if both are still alive—picture to yourself that I had two children, two sons, both of whom I loved with a father's love, one especially."

The stranger gave a start and came closer to the old man.

"Oh! if you had known them both," he continued, "you would have understood that. It is not that Georges—his name was Georges, was the most handsome: on the contrary, his brother Jacques was a finer lad than he; but he had in his poor little body a mind so intelligent, so keen, so resolute, that, had I put him to the College at Port-Louis with the other boys, I am quite certain that, although he was only twelve, he would soon have left all the other scholars behind."

The old man's eyes shone for an instant with pride and enthusiasm, but this change passed with the swiftness of lightning, and his look had already resumed its vague, timid, dull expression when he added:—

"But I could not put him to school here. The College was founded for whites, and we are only mulattos."

The young man's countenance brightened in turn, and a flame, as it were of contempt and fierce anger, passed over his face.

The old man continued without even noticing the feeling displayed by the stranger.

"That is why I sent them both to

France, in the hope that education would settle the roving propensities of the elder, and subdue the too self-willed character of the younger. But it seems that God did not approve my resolve; for, in a visit that he made to Brest, Jacques embarked on a privateer, and I have only heard from him three times since, and each time from a different quarter of the world; while Georges in growing up has allowed the germ of self-will which alarmed me in him to develop. He has written to me more often, sometimes from England, sometimes from Egypt, sometimes from Spain, for he too has travelled a great deal, and, though his letters are very good, I assure you I have not ventured to show them to any one."

"Then neither of them has ever mentioned to you the date of his return?"

"Never; and who knows even if I shall ever see them again; for though, on my part, the moment when I saw them once more would be the happiest of my life, I have never spoken to them of returning. If they stay away, it is because they are happier there than they would be here; if they do not feel a desire to see their old father again, it is because they have found people in Europe whom they love better than him. So let them have their wish, especially if that wish can lead them to happiness. Still, though I regret them both, it is Georges I miss especially, and it is he who causes me the most grief by never alluding to his return."

"If he does not speak of his return, sir," replied the stranger in a tone from which he vainly tried to repress the emotion, "it is perhaps because he is reserving for himself the pleasure of surprising you, and that he wishes you to conclude in happiness a day begun in expectation."

"God grant it!" said the old man, lifting his eyes and hands to heaven.

"Perhaps it is," continued the young man in tones of increased emotion, "that he wishes to creep up to you without being recognised by you, and so to enjoy your presence, your love, and your blessing."

"Ah! it would be impossible for me not to recognise him."

"And yet," cried the young man, unable to resist any longer the feeling which agitated him, "you have not recognised me, father!"

"You! you!" exclaimed the old man, devouring the stranger with an eager



glance, while he trembled in all his limbs, his mouth half open and smiling doubtfully. Then, shaking his head:—

“No, no,” said he, “it is not Georges; there is some resemblance between you and him; but he is not tall, not handsome like you; he is but a child, and you are a man.”

“It is I, father; it is I; you must recognise me,” cried Georges; “remember that fourteen years have passed since I have seen you; remember that I am now twenty-six, and if you doubt, here, look at this scar on my forehead, the mark of the blow which M. de Malmédie gave me the day when you so gloriously captured an English flag. Oh! father, open your arms, and, when you have embraced me and pressed me to your heart, you will no longer doubt that I am your son.”

And with these words the stranger threw himself on the neck of the old man, who, looking now at the sky, now at his child, could not believe in so much happiness, and only made up his mind to embrace the handsome young man when the latter had repeated for the twentieth time that he was really Georges.

At this moment Télémaque appeared at the bottom of the hill of *La Découverte*, his arms hanging down, his eyes mournful and his head drooping, grieved that he was returning once more to his master without bringing him any news of either of his children.

## CHAPTER VI

### A TRANSFORMATION

AND now our readers must allow us to leave father and son to the enjoyment of reunion, and consent to go back with us over the past, and trace the physical and moral transformation which had taken place during the space of fourteen years in the hero of our tale, of whom we have given them a glimpse as a child and whom we have just shown them as a man.

We had at first intended to put before our readers' eyes purely and simply the history which Georges gave his father of the events of these fourteen years; but

we reflected that, this story being entirely one of inmost thoughts and private feelings, the veracity of a man of Georges' character, especially when that man speaks about himself, might with good reason be distrusted. We have determined, therefore, to relate the facts, with every detail of which we are acquainted personally, and in our own way, promising beforehand, since our own self-esteem is not concerned in the matter, to conceal no feeling, whether good or bad, no thought, whether creditable or disgraceful.

Let us start then from the same point from which Georges himself had started.

Pierre Munier, whose character we have tried to describe, had, from the time that he first entered on active life, that is to say, from the time that he changed from boyhood to manhood, adopted a system of conduct towards the whites from which he had never swerved; feeling neither the strength nor the wish to combat as a duellist an overwhelming prejudice, he had formed the resolve of disarming his enemies by an unalterable submission and an inexhaustible humility, his whole life was occupied in apologising for his birth. Far from soliciting, in spite of his wealth and intelligence, any public office or political employment, he had constantly tried to efface himself by losing himself in the crowd; the same motive which had withdrawn him from public life guided him in his private capacity. By nature generous and magnificent, he regulated his house with an almost monastic simplicity. There was abundance everywhere, but a total absence of luxury, though he had nearly two hundred slaves, which constitutes in the Colonies a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand pounds per annum. He went about always on horseback until forced by age, or rather by the troubles which had broken him down before his time, to exchange this modest custom for a more aristocratic one, he bought a palanquin quite as unpretending as that of the poorest inhabitant of the Island. Always careful to avoid the slightest quarrel, always polite, agreeable, obliging to everybody, even to those whom, at the bottom of his heart, he disliked, he would rather have lost ten acres of land than commence or even sustain a law-suit which might have gained him twenty acres. If any inhabitant wanted plants of coffee, manioc or sugar-cane, he was sure of getting them

from Pierre Munier, who even thanked him for giving him the preference. Well, all this good behaviour, which proceeded from the instincts of his excellent heart, but which might have appeared to be the result of his timid disposition, had doubtless gained for him the goodwill of his neighbours, yet merely a passive friendliness which, never having entertained the idea of doing him good, was limited purely and simply to doing him no harm. Still, there were some among them who, unable to pardon Pierre Munier his immense fortune, his numerous slaves and spotless reputation, tried constantly to crush him beneath the prejudice of colour. M. de Malmédie and his son were of that number.

Georges, born in the same condition as his father, but whose weakness of constitution had debarred him from physical exercise, had directed all his mental faculties to reflection, and precocious beyond his age, as weakly children generally are, had observed instinctively his father's conduct, the motives of which he had penetrated while still young; and the manly pride which surged in the child's breast had caused him to hate the whites who despised him, as well as the mulattos who allowed themselves to be despised. Accordingly, he firmly resolved to follow a line of conduct precisely the opposite of that which his father had observed, and, when he had grown big and strong, to advance vigorously and boldly to confront these ridiculous sentimental prejudices, and, if they did not give way before him, to seize them by the body as Hercules did Antæus, and crush them in his arms. Did not the youthful Hannibal, at his father's instigation, vow eternal hatred against a nation? Well! the youthful Georges, in spite of his father, swore war to the death against a prejudice.

Georges quitted the Colony after the scene that we have related, arrived in France with his brother, and entered the Collège Napoléon. Hardly was he seated on the benches of the lowest class before he grasped the difference of ranks and wished to reach the top: for him, superiority was a necessity of his organisation; he learnt quickly and well. A first success strengthened his desire by giving him the measure of his capabilities. His desire became stronger and his successes greater. True this mental work, and this development of his thoughts,

left his body in its primitive state of feebleness, the moral absorbed the physical, the steel wore away the scabbard; but God had given a support to the tender plant. Georges enjoyed peace under the protection of Jacques, who was the strongest and idlest fellow in his class, as Georges was the hardest worker and the weakest.

Unfortunately, this state of things did not last long. Two years after their arrival, when Jacques and Georges had gone to spend their holidays at Brest with a business correspondent of their father's to whom they had been recommended, Jacques, who had always had a decided liking for the sea, profited by the opportunity which offered, and, weary of his prison, as he termed the College, embarked on a privateer, which he described to his father, in a letter he wrote him, as a Government vessel. On his return to school Georges felt his brother's absence cruelly. Without protection against the jealousy which his scholastic triumphs had aroused, and which, from the moment that it could be gratified, turned into absolute hatred, he was insulted by some, beaten by others, ill-treated by all; each had his favourite torture for him. It was a rough experience, which Georges endured bravely.

Only, he reflected more deeply than ever on his position, and realised that moral superiority was nothing without physical superiority; that the one was required to make the other respected, and that only the union of these two qualities made a man complete. From this time he changed his manner of life completely; from being the timid, retiring, inactive creature that he had been, he became playful, noisy and rowdy. He still worked pretty hard, but only sufficiently so to maintain the intellectual pre-eminence he had gained in the preceding years. At the start he was clumsy and they made fun of him. Georges took their mockery in bad part, and that of set purpose. He had not by nature the courage of hot temper, but that of brooding anger; that is to say, his first impulse, instead of throwing him into danger, was to make him retire in order to avoid it. He needed reflection to make him act bravely, and, though this bravery is the most real, since it is moral bravery, he was afraid of it as though it were an act of cowardice. He fought then on every quarrel,—or rather he was beaten;



but, though beaten once, he started afresh every day until he proved victorious, not because he was the stronger, but because he was the better disciplined. For in the thick of the most stubborn fight he preserved an admirable coolness, and, thanks to this coolness, profited by the least mistake on the part of his antagonist. This gained him respect, and his schoolfellows began to think twice before insulting him; for, however weak an enemy may be, you hesitate to enter into a contest with him when you know he is determined. Besides, the prodigious ardour with which he embraced this new kind of life bore its fruit; Georges gradually gained strength, and, encouraged by his first attempts, never opened a book during the next holidays, but began to learn to swim and ride, continually inflicting fatigue upon himself—fatigue which more than once threw him into a fever, but to which in the end he grew accustomed. Next to exercises of skill he added feats of strength; for whole days he dug like a labourer, and carried loads like a workman, then, in the evening, instead of lying warm and comfortable in his bed, he wrapped himself in his cloak, threw himself on a bearskin mat, and so slept all night. For an instant nature hesitated in amazement, not knowing if she should give in or win the day. Georges felt that he was risking his life, but what did his life matter unless it brought him the strength and skill that would give him superiority over others? Nature proved victorious; physical weakness vanquished by energy of will, disappeared like a faithless servant dismissed by an implacable master. In short, three months of this system so set up the weakly lad that on his return his comrades scarcely recognised him. Then it was he who sought out quarrels with others, and who thrashed in his turn those who had so often thrashed him. Then it was he who was feared, and who, being feared, was respected. Besides, in proportion as his bodily strength developed, the beauty of his countenance increased in harmony with it. Georges had always possessed fine eyes and perfect teeth; he allowed his long black hair to grow, and by dint of care reduced its natural coarseness, making it supple by constant use of the scissors. His unhealthy pallor was replaced by a fine morbidezza, suggestive of melancholy and distinction; in short he made a study of becoming handsome as a man, just as

he had made a study of becoming strong and skilful as a boy.

So, when Georges, after having completed his course of philosophy, left College, he was a graceful young fellow, five feet four in height, and, as we have said, though a trifle slim, very well proportioned. He knew almost everything that a young man of the world ought to know. But he realised that it was not enough to possess in all respects the power of the average man; he determined to surpass him in all respects.

Besides, the course of training which he had determined to undergo became easy to him, now that he was set free from the routine of school work and henceforth master of his own time. He laid down rules for the employment of his day, from which he resolved never to deviate; he rode every morning at six; at eight, he practised pistol-shooting; from ten to twelve, fencing; from twelve to two, attended University lectures; sketched, from three to five, sometimes in one studio, sometimes in another; his evenings he spent at the theatre or in society, where all doors were open to him, less on account of his wealth than of his charming manners.

Georges accordingly became intimate with all the best known artists, literary men, and leaders of society in Paris; connoisseur alike in art, science, and fashion, he was soon cited as one of the most intelligent minds, as one of the most logical thinkers, as well as one of the most charming squires-of-dames in the capital. Georges had almost attained his ambition.

There remained, however, a final experiment for him to make. Certain of his mastery over others, he did not yet know if he was master of himself. Now, Georges was not the man to remain in doubt on any point whatever; he resolved to be enlightened on the question of self-mastery.

Georges had often dreaded becoming a gambler.

One day he went to Frascati's with his pockets full of gold, having said to himself, "I will play three times, each time for three hours, and during those three hours I will risk ten thousand francs; when the three hours are up, I will leave off, whether I have won or lost."

The first day Georges lost his ten thousand francs in an hour and half. He

spent the rest of his three hours, however, in watching the others, and though he had bank-notes in his pocket-book for the twenty thousand francs which he had decided to risk in the two remaining attempts, he did not put upon the table a louis more than he had in the first instance intended to.

On the second day, he started by winning twenty-five thousand francs; then, as he had meant to play for three hours, he went on, and lost all his winnings, besides two thousand francs of his original capital. At that moment, noticing that his three hours had expired, he left off with the same punctuality as the day before.

On the third day, he began by losing; but, with his last bank-note, luck changed and declared in his favour; he had three-quarters of an hour left, during which he played with one of those curious runs of luck which frequenters of the saloons perpetuate by tradition. During these three-quarters of an hour Georges seemed to have made a compact with the devil, by whose aid an invisible sprite whispered to him beforehand the colour which would turn up and the winning card. The pile of gold and notes in front of him mounted up to the astonishment of the onlookers. Georges left off calculating, and threw his money on the table, saying to the banker, "Put it where you please." The banker staked it at random, and still Georges won. Two professional gamblers, who had followed his luck and won enormous sums, thought the moment had arrived to take the opposite line, and accordingly laid against him; but fortune remained faithful to Georges. They lost all they had won, as well as all the money they had about them; then, as they were known as safe customers, the banker lent them fifty thousand francs, which they also lost.

Georges watched his heap of gold and notes increasing without betraying by his features the slightest trace of excitement, merely glancing now and then at the clock which would sound the hour for him to cease playing. At last the time arrived. Georges left off at once, handed his winnings to his servant, and with the same calmness, the same sang-froid, with which he had played, whether winning or losing, went out, an object of envy to all who had witnessed the scene that had just taken place, and who fully expected to see him come back next day.

But, contrary to everybody's expectation, Georges did not appear again. Nay more; he shovelled the gold and notes into a drawer of his desk, determining not to open the drawer for a week. When the day arrived, Georges opened the drawer and counted his winnings; they amounted to two hundred and thirty thousand francs.

Georges was well satisfied with himself; he had overcome a passion.

Georges had the strong sensual passions of men who live in tropical countries.

One evening after an orgy, some of his friends took him to the house of a courtesan celebrated for her beauty and capricious likes and dislikes. On this particular evening this modern Laïs was seized with a virtuous fit. The evening was spent in edifying conversation; the lady of the house might have passed for a candidate for the *Prix Montyon*. The eyes, however, of the fair preacher might have been seen occasionally fixed on Georges with an expression of eager desire which belied the coldness of her words. Georges on his side, thought her even more attractive than she had been described to him, and for three days the recollection of this seductive Astarté haunted the young man's maiden fancy. On the fourth day, Georges took the road to the house where she lived, and, with his heart beating loudly, pulled the bell so violently that the rope nearly broke in his hand. Then, hearing the footsteps of the maid approaching, he bade his heart stop beating and his face look unconcerned, and in tones in which not the slightest trace of emotion was apparent, asked the servant to conduct him to her mistress. The latter, hearing his voice, sprang to him with joy; for Georges' image, the sight of which had made a deep impression on her the moment she saw it, had never left her mind since. She hoped, then, that love, or at any rate lust, was bringing back this handsome young fellow, who had so captivated her fancy.

She was mistaken; Georges had determined to put himself to a further trial; he had come there to make a will of iron give battle to his ardent feelings. For two hours he remained with the woman, alleging a wager as the excuse for his want of passion, wrestling against the torrent of his desires and the caresses of the siren; then, after two hours he went away, having come off victorious



in this second trial, as he had done in the first.

Georges was well satisfied with himself; he had subdued his feelings.

We have said that Georges did not possess the physical courage which rushes into the midst of danger, but only the brooding courage that waits until it cannot avoid it. Georges feared that he was not really brave, and had often trembled at the notion that, if danger threatened, he might not be sure of himself and might, in fact, behave perhaps like a coward. This idea troubled him greatly; so he resolved to seize the first opportunity that offered to pit his mind against danger. The opportunity presented itself in a curious manner.

One day Georges was at Lepage's with a friend of his, and, while waiting till there was a vacant place, watched the performance of a frequenter of the establishment, who, like himself, was acknowledged to be one of the best pistol-shots in Paris.

The man who was practising at this moment was performing nearly all the incredible tricks of skill attributed by tradition to St. George and which are the despair of the neophyte; that is to say, he hit the bull's eye every time, repeated his shots so that the second mark exactly covered the first, sliced a bullet on the edge of a knife, and performed many other similar feats without a single failure. It should be said that the presence of Georges acted as a further incentive to his efforts, for the attendant when handing him his pistol had whispered to him that Georges was quite as skilful a shot as himself, the result being that he surpassed himself at each turn, but without winning from his rival the praise he undoubtedly deserved, for, in answer to the applause from the gallery, Georges merely observed:—

"Oh! he shoots well, of course, but firing at a target is a very different thing from firing at a man."

This depreciation of his skill as a duellist surprised and mortified the marksman. So, when Georges had for the third time uttered this qualified form of praise, the other turned and remarked in a tone that was half bantering, half threatening:—

"It seems to me, sir, that this is the second or third time you have insinuated a doubt as to my courage; will you be

good enough to give me the clear and precise meaning of your words?"

"My words need no explanation," answered Georges, "and seem to me to speak for themselves quite sufficiently."

"Then, sir, will you be good enough to repeat them once more, that I may estimate their import and the intention that prompted them."

"I said," replied Georges, with the most perfect calmness, "when I saw you hit the mark every time, that, if you were aiming at a man's breast instead of at a target, you would not be so sure either of your hand or your eye."

"And why, may I ask?"

"Because it seems to me that in shooting at a fellow-creature there must always be a degree of excitement that is bound to disturb the aim."

"You have fought many duels, sir?"

"Not one," replied Georges.

"Ah! then I am not surprised at your supposing it possible to feel alarm in such circumstances," replied the stranger with a slightly ironical smile.

"Excuse me, sir," answered Georges; "but I think you misunderstood me; I imagine that one would tremble with something else besides fear at the moment of killing one's man."

"I never tremble, sir," answered the other.

"Possibly," answered Georges in the same calm manner, "but I am none the less convinced that at twenty paces, at the same distance that is to say, at which you make all your bull's eyes . . . ."

"Well, what?" said the stranger.

"At twenty paces you would miss your man," replied Georges.

"And I am convinced of the contrary, sir."

"Allow me to doubt your statement."

"You give me the lie then?"

"No, I maintain a fact."

"A fact which I imagine you would shrink from putting to the proof," replied the champion shot in a sneering tone.

"Why should I?" answered Georges looking him hard in the face.

"But you would prefer the experiment made on some one else than yourself, I take it?"

"On somebody else, or on myself, it does not matter which."

"You would be something rash, I warn you, in risking such a proof."

"No, for I have given my opinion, and

consequently am convinced that I should run a very slight risk."

"So, sir, you tell me for the second time that at twenty paces I should miss my man?"

"You are wrong, sir, it is the fifth time, if I remember right."

"Sir, this is too much; you evidently want to insult me."

"You are quite at liberty to think that, if you like."

"Very well, sir. Your hour?"

"This very moment, if you choose."

"Where?"

"We are only five hundred yards from the Bois de Boulogne."

"What weapons?"

"What weapons? Why, the pistol of course; it is not a question of fighting a duel, but of making an experiment."

"I am at your service, sir."

"And I at yours."

The young men, each accompanied by a friend, got into two cabs. On arriving at the spot the two seconds tried to settle the matter, but found a difficulty in doing so. Georges' antagonist demanded an apology, while Georges declared that no apology was due, unless he should be wounded or killed, since only in that event would he be proved wrong; and a quarter-of-an-hour was wasted by the seconds in fruitless negotiations. Then they wanted to place the combatants thirty yards apart, but Georges objected that it was not a genuine experiment unless they stood at the ordinary distance for shooting at the target, namely, twenty-five yards. Accordingly they measured out this distance. Then they wished to toss up to decide who should fire first, but Georges declared that he considered this preliminary useless, as, under the circumstances, the right of priority naturally lay with his opponent; while his opponent made it a point of honour that an advantage which, between two men of so much skill, would give every chance to the one who fired first, should be decided by lot. Georges, however, stuck to his point, and his opponent had to give way.

The attendant from the shooting-gallery had followed the combatants. He loaded the pistols with the same quantities of powder and shot that had been used in the previous target-practice; in fact, they were the same pistols, for Georges had insisted on this point as a *sine qua non*.

The opponents stood at twenty-five

paces and each received from his second a pistol ready loaded. Then the seconds walked away, leaving the combatants free to fire at each other in the order agreed upon.

Georges took none of the precautions usual in such circumstances; not attempting to guard any part of his body with his pistol, he let his arm hang down his thigh and presented the whole of his breast entirely unprotected.

His opponent was puzzled at such behaviour. He had often been in a similar situation, but had never seen such coolness, and the firm conviction Georges had expressed now began to produce its effect; this skilful shot, who had never yet failed, had misgivings about himself. Twice he levelled his pistol at Georges and twice he lowered it. This was contrary to all the rules of duelling, but Georges contented himself each time with the remark:—

"Take your time, sir; take your time."

At the third attempt he felt ashamed and fired. It was a moment of terrible suspense for the seconds; but directly after the report Georges turned first to right and then to left, and, bowing to the seconds to show that he was not wounded, remarked to his opponent:—

"Well, sir, you see that I was right, and that it is more uncertain work shooting at a man than shooting at a target."

"That is so, sir; I was wrong," answered Georges' opponent. "It is your turn to fire."

"Mine?" said Georges, picking up his hat, which he had placed on the ground, and handing his pistol to the attendant, "why should I shoot at you?"

"But, sir, you are entitled to do so, and I insist upon it; besides, I should like to see how you shoot, yourself."

"Excuse me," said Georges with his imperturbable calmness, "let us understand one another, please. I did not say that I should hit you; I said you would not hit me, and you have not done so; that is all."

And in spite of all entreaties from his opponent that he would fire in return, Georges got into his cab again, repeating to his friend:—

"Well, didn't I say that it made a difference whether you shoot at a wooden figure or a human being?"

Georges was well satisfied with himself, for he was now sure about his courage.



These three adventures got talked about and established our hero firmly in Society. Two or three coquettes made it a point of honour to captivate this modern Cato; and, as he had no motive for resisting them, he soon became a man of fashion. But just when they thought him most firmly secured, the time that he had fixed for his travels arrived, and one fine morning Georges took leave of his mistresses, and, sending a princely present to each of them, started for London.

In London Georges was received everywhere. He kept horses, dogs and cocks, and went in for racing and cock-fighting, took all the wagers offered, and lost and won large amounts with quite aristocratic unconcern. In short, after a year he left London with the reputation of a thorough gentleman, as he had left Paris with that of a charming ladies' man. It was during this stay in the capital of Great Britain that he came across Lord Murray, but, as we have said, without making further acquaintance with him.

It was the period when travelling in the East became fashionable. Georges visited Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt in succession. He was presented to Mehemet-Ali at the moment when Ibrahim Pacha was starting on his Saïd expedition, accompanied the Viceroy's son, fought under his eyes, and was presented by him with a sword of honour and two Arab horses, selected from the finest of his stud.

Georges returned to France through Italy. Preparation was being made for the Spanish expedition; Georges rushed to Paris and asked permission to serve as a volunteer. This being granted, he joined the ranks of the first battalion that started, and was constantly to the front.

Unfortunately, contrary to all expectation, the Spaniards offered no resistance, and the campaign, which was thought at first likely to prove a stiff affair, turned out to be merely a military promenade. At the Trocadero, however, the aspect of affairs changed, and it was seen that it would be necessary to sweep away by force this last bulwark of revolution in the Peninsula.

The regiment which Georges had joined was not told off for the assault, so Georges exchanged and joined the Grenadiers. When the breach was effected and

the signal for scaling given, Georges dashed in at the head of the attacking column and was the third to enter the fortress. His name was quoted in despatches, and he received from the hands of the Duc d'Angoulême the cross of the Legion of Honour, and from Ferdinand VII. the cross of Charles III. Georges had only aimed at one distinction; he had obtained two. The gallant fellow was at the height of delight.

He thought the moment was at last arrived for his return to the Isle of France. He had accomplished all that he had dreamed of, and passed every goal he had desired to reach; there was nothing more for him to do in Europe. His strife with civilisation was over, while his strife with barbarism was about to begin. His was a mind full of a pride that would not be consoled by squandering in the pleasures of Europe the strength painfully acquired for a combat nearer home; all that he had gone through for the last ten years was in order to surpass his fellow-countrymen, white as well as black, and be able to crush by his sole influence the dislike which no coloured man had as yet dared to combat. Little cared he for Europe and its hundred and fifty millions of inhabitants, for France with her thirty-three millions; little for Parliament or ministry, republic or kingdom. What he preferred above all the rest of the world and what took up all his thoughts was his own little corner of the earth, a mere dot upon the map, like a grain of sand at the bottom of the sea. But then, on this little spot of earth, he had a great achievement to perform, a great problem to solve. He cherished but one recollection, of having undergone humiliation; he had but one hope, of getting the upper hand.

Meanwhile the Leicester put into port at Cadiz. She was on her way to the Isle of France, where she was to be stationed. Georges asked for a passage on board this fine vessel, which he obtained through the recommendation of the French and Spanish authorities. In reality, he owed the favour to the fact that Lord Murray had discovered the person requiring the passage was a native of the Isle of France, and was not at all sorry to have some one who would give him beforehand, during a voyage of four thousand leagues, those numerous bits of information on politics and customs which it is so important for

a Governor to have acquired before entering upon his new sphere.

We have seen how Georges and Lord Murray had gradually formed acquaintance and arrived at a certain degree of intimacy on landing at Port-Louis. We have seen, too, how Georges, dutiful son as he was and devoted to his father, had been obliged on his arrival to submit to a lengthy proof before being recognised. The old man's joy was all the greater for his having reckoned so little on his son's return. Moreover, the man who had come home was so different from the man who was expected, that all the way back to Moka the father could never cease looking at his son, stopping occasionally as if lost in thought. Each time he did this, the old man pressed his son to his heart with such effusion that Georges, spite of the self-control on which he prided himself, felt the tears come into his eyes.

After three hours' walking they came to the plantation; Télémaque, at a quarter-of-an-hour's distance from the house, had gone on in advance, so that, on their arrival Georges and his father found all the negroes awaiting them with a joy that was mingled with fear, for this young man whom they had only seen as a child was come to them as a fresh master, and they wondered what sort of a master he would prove.

His return indeed had a most important bearing on the future happiness or misery of all these poor people. The auguries were favourable. Georges began by giving them that day and the next as a holiday, and, as the day following that again was a Sunday, this holiday meant a good three days' rest. Then Georges, eager to judge for himself what importance his landed estate would give him in the island, scarcely allowed himself time to dine, and then, followed by his father, visited the whole estate. Fortunate speculations, no less than diligent and well-directed labour, had made it one of the finest properties in the Colony. In the centre of the estate was the house, a plain but roomy building, shaded by a triple row of trees that surrounded it, bananas, mangoes, and tamarinds, which opened in the front on a long avenue of trees leading to the road, and at the back on fragrant orchards where the double-flowering pomegranates softly swaying in the wind kissed in turn a cluster of oranges or a bunch of yellow bananas, rising and sinking con-

tinually like a bee hovering between two flowers, or a soul hesitating between two desires. Lastly, all around it, as far as the eye could reach, stretched great fields of cane or maize which, as though overweighted with the rich store of food they bore, seemed to implore the hand of the reaper.

Last of all you come to what is called, in every plantation, the Negroes' Cantonment. In the middle of this rose a large building, used in winter as a barn, in summer as a dancing-hall, whence now proceeded loud shouts of delight, mingled with the sound of the tambourine, the drum and the Madagascar harp. The Blacks, eagerly availing themselves of their holiday, had at once put themselves en fête; for their primitive nature knows no gradations; they pass straight from toil to pleasure, and rest from their fatigue by dancing. Georges and his father opened the door and appeared suddenly among them.

Instantly the dance was interrupted; each pressed to his neighbour's side, trying to fall into their places, like soldiers surprised by their Colonel. Then, after a moment of agitated silence, they greeted their masters with a triple shout, which for once was a perfectly frank expression of their feelings. Well clothed and well fed, and seldom punished since they seldom failed in their duty, they worshipped Pierre Munier, the only mulatto, perhaps, in the Colony who, while subservient towards the Whites, did not treat the Blacks with cruelty. As for Georges, whose return, as we have said, had inspired these poor fellows with grave fears, as though he had guessed the effect produced by his presence, he raised his hand as a sign that he wished to speak. The deepest silence at once ensued, and the Negroes listened with eagerness to the following words which fell from his mouth with a slowness and solemnity befitting a promise and an undertaking:—

“ My friends, I am touched by the welcome you have given me, and even more by the happiness beaming on your faces. My father makes you happy, I know, and I thank him for it; for it is my duty, as it is his, to make happy those who will obey me, I hope, as dutifully as they obey him. There are three hundred of you here, and you have only ninety huts; my father wishes you to build sixty more, one for every two of you; each hut will have a small garden, where every one will be



allowed to plant tobacco, yams and sweet potatoes, and to keep a pig and fowls. Those who want to turn these things into money will go and sell them on Sundays at Port-Louis, and dispose of the produce of the sale as they please. If any theft is committed, there will be a severe punishment for him who has robbed his neighbour; if any one is unjustly flogged by the overseer, let him prove that his punishment is not deserved, and justice will be done him. The case of runaways I do not anticipate, for you are and will be too happy, I hope, ever to think of leaving us."

Fresh cries of joy greeted this short speech, which will no doubt seem trifling and frivolous to the sixty millions of Europeans who have the good fortune to live under a constitutional system, but which, out there, was received with the more enthusiasm since it was the very first charter of the kind which had ever been granted in the Colony.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DINNER DRUM

**D**URING the evening of the next day, which was, as we have said, a Saturday, an assembly of Negroes, less merry than the one we have just left, was gathered under a large shed, and, seated round a huge fire of dried branches, was quietly spending the dinner-drum or *berloque* as it is termed in the Colonies. That is to say, each individual, according to his needs or his disposition, was engaged either in some manual work intended to be sold next day, or in cooking rice, manioc, or bananas. Some were smoking in wooden pipes tobacco, not only of native growth but even gathered from their own gardens; others were talking together in subdued tones. In the middle of all the groups the women and children, whose business it was to keep up the fires, went to and fro continually. But, notwithstanding all this bustle and movement and the fact that the evening would be followed by a day of rest, a feeling of sadness and uneasiness seemed to oppress these unfortunate people. This was caused by the tyranny of the Manager, who was himself a Mulatto. The

shed was situated in the lower part of the Williams Plains, at the foot of the *Trois Mamelles* mountain, round which lay the property of our old acquaintance M. de Malmédie.

Not that M. de Malmédie was a bad master in the French acceptation of the term. No, M. de Malmédie was an easy-going man, incapable of spite or revenge, but infected in the highest degree with his own civil and political importance, filled with pride as he reflected on the purity of the blood that ran in his veins, and sharing, with an innate faith which had been handed down from father to son, in the prejudice which still at that period in the Isle of France pursued men of colour. As for the slaves, they were no worse off on his estate than they were elsewhere; they were unhappy everywhere, for the Negroes, in the eyes of M. de Malmédie, as of others, were not regarded as human beings, but as machines for yielding certain produce. Now, when a machine fails to do the work which it is expected to do, it is set going again by mechanical means, and so M. de Malmédie simply applied to the Negroes the theory which he would have applied in the case of machines. When the Negroes ceased to work, either from idleness or fatigue, the overseer started them again with the whip; the machine resumed its movement, and, at the week's end, the total output reached its proper amount.

As for Henri de Malmédie, he was the replica of his father, only twenty years younger, and with an extra dose of pride.

The moral and material condition then of the slaves in the district of the Williams Plains differed widely from that of the labourers in the Moka district.

Accordingly, at the dinner-drums, called, as we have said, *berloques*, gaiety came quite spontaneously to the slaves of Pierre Munier, while, on the other hand, in the case of those of M. de Malmédie it had to be stimulated by a song, or a story, or something to be seen. There are always to be found, in the tropics as well as in our own land, beneath the negro's shed as well as in the soldier's camp, one or two of those comic people who undertake the business—a more tiring one than might be supposed—of amusing society, and whom society in its gratitude repays in many different ways; it being understood that if society forgets, as sometimes happens, to pay its debt,

the comedian very naturally reminds it of the fact that he is its creditor.

Well, the man who discharged in M. de Malmédie's establishment the functions which Triboulet and l'Angeli formerly fulfilled at the court of François I. and Louis XIII. was a little fellow whose corpulent body was supported by such slender legs, that it seemed at first sight impossible they could bear its weight.

However, the balance upset by the middle of his person was restored at its two extremities, the big trunk carrying a small head with a yellow complexioned face, while the thin legs ended in a pair of enormous feet. As for his arms, they were of extraordinary length, like those of monkeys,—animals which, while walking on their hind feet, pick up objects which they find in their path, without stooping.

The result of all this want of proportion in the limbs of this new character whom we have brought upon the scene was a singular mixture of the grotesque and the terrible. To European eyes, the latter would have predominated so as to cause a feeling of intense repulsion; the Negroes, however, who are less susceptible to beauty in the human form than ourselves, looked at him generally from the comic point of view, though occasionally beneath his monkey's skin the tiger in him extended his claws and showed his teeth. His name was Antonio, and he was born at Tingoram; so, to distinguish him from the other Antonios, who would no doubt have felt hurt at being confused with him, he was usually called Antonio the Malay.

The *berloque* then was proceeding somewhat sadly, as we have said, when Antonio who, without being seen, had glided behind one of the posts supporting the shed, raised his yellow head and uttered a little hiss like that made by the hooded snake, one of the most terrible reptiles in the Malay peninsula. This noise if uttered in the plains of Tenasserim, the marshes of Java, or the sands of Quiloa, would have frozen the hearer with terror; but in the Isle of France where, with the exception of the sharks that swim in shoals round its shores, no deadly creature is ever seen, the noise in question produced no other result than that of making the assembled blacks open their eyes and mouths wide. Then, as though guided by the sound, all heads were turned to the new-comer, and all lips uttered the same cry:—

"Antonio the Malay! hurrah for Antonio!"

Two or three of the Negroes, however, started and half rose; they were Malagassies, Yollofs, or Zanzibar blacks, who had heard that sound in their childhood and had not forgotten it.

One of them got up altogether, a dark, handsome fellow, whom, apart from his colour, you might have taken as belonging to the finest Caucasian race. But no sooner had he recognised the cause of the sound that had drawn him from his meditation, than he lay down again, muttering with a contempt that equalled the delight of the other slaves:—"Antonio the Malay!"

Antonio with three bounds of his long limbs found himself in the centre of the circle; then, jumping over the fire, he came down on the other side and seated himself cross-legged like a tailor.

"A song, Antonio! a song!" they all shouted.

Antonio, unlike those artists who are sure of producing their effect, needed no pressing; he took from his wallet a jew's harp, and, putting it to his mouth, extracted from it some preparatory sounds by way of prelude. Then, accompanying his words with amusing gestures suitable to the subject, he sang the following:—

I.

My home's a little hut,  
I stoop to pass the door;  
My head the ceiling strikes  
When my feet are on the floor.  
At night I go to sleep,  
But do not need a light;  
There's plenty holes, thank God,  
Through which the moon shines bright.

II.

My bed an Island mat,  
My pillow is a log;  
My cellar an old gourd,  
In which I keep my grog.  
On Saturday my wife  
My fav'rite supper hashes,  
And in my small hut cooks  
Bananas on the ashes.

III.

My coffer is not shut,  
Because it has no locks,  
For who would look for pelf  
Inside a bamboo box.  
I empty it on Sunday  
My 'baccy for to buy,  
And all week smoke my carob pipe,  
Until my stock runs dry.



To have an idea of the effect produced by Antonio's song, in spite of the poverty of the rhyme and the simplicity of the ideas, one must have lived among these primitive people, with whom everything whatsoever is matter for sentiment. At the end of the first and second verses there was laughter and applause. At the end of the third there were shouts and hurrahs. Only the young Negro, who had manifested his contempt for Antonio, shrugged his shoulders with a grimace of disgust.

As for Antonio, instead of enjoying his triumph as one might have expected, and swelling with pride at the vehemence of the applause, he leaned his elbows on his knees, letting his head sink upon his hands, and seemed to give himself up to deep thought.

Now, as Antonio was the life and soul of the company, with his silence gloom once more settled upon the assembly.—They begged him accordingly to tell them a story or sing another song. But Antonio turned a deaf ear to them, and the most urgent entreaties obtained no other answer but the same incomprehensible and obstinate silence.

At last one of those nearest to him, tapping him on the shoulder, asked:—

"What's the matter, Malay?; are you dead?"

"No," answered Antonio, "I'm all alive."

"What are you doing then?"

"Thinking."

"What about?"

"I am thinking," said Antonio, "that the time of the *berloque* is a pleasant one. When the kind God has lighted the sky and the hour of the *berloque* comes, every one works with cheerfulness; for everybody is working for his own benefit, though there are some idle fellows who waste their time in smoking, like you, Toukal; or greedy ones who amuse themselves by cooking bananas, like you, Cambeba. But, as I said, there are others who work; you, for instance, Castor, are making chairs; you, Bonhomme, wooden spoons; you, Nazim, are making — nothing."

"Nazim does as he pleases," answered the young Negro; "Nazim is the stag of Anjouan, as Laïza is its lion, and what lions and stags do is no concern of serpents."

Antonio bit his lips; then, after a

moment's silence during which the young Negro's voice seemed still to vibrate, he continued:—

"I was thinking, then, and telling you that the time of the *berloque* was a pleasant one; but in order that you, Castor and Bonhomme, may not feel tired with your work, and that the smoke of your tobacco may seem nicer to you, Toukal; and that you, Cambeba, may not go to sleep while your banana is cooking, you want some one to tell you stories or to sing to you."

"That's true," said Castor, "and Antonio knows some right good stories and songs too."

"But," went on the Malay, "when Antonio doesn't sing his songs or tell his stories, what happens? Why, everybody goes to sleep, because they are all tired out with the week's work. Then the *berloque* is a failure; you, Castor, don't make your bamboo chairs, or you, Bonhomme, your wooden spoons; you, Toukal, let your pipe go out, and you, Cambeba, let your banana burn; isn't it so?"

"Quite true," replied not only those particularly addressed, but the whole crowd of slaves, with the exception of Nazim, who continued to maintain a contemptuous silence.

"Then you ought to be grateful to the man who tells you good stories to keep you awake, and sings nice songs to make you laugh."

"Thank you," Antonio, "thank you," shouted all the voices.

"Is there any one, besides Antonio, who can tell you stories?"

"Laïza—he knows some fine stories, too."

"Yes, but his stories frighten you."

"That's true," answered the Negroes.

"And, besides Antonio, is there any one who can sing you songs?"

"Nazim—he too has some fine songs."

"Yes, but they make you weep."

"That's true," continued the Negroes.

"And who gave you a song four days ago?"

"You, Malay."

"Who told you a story three days ago?"

"You, Malay."

"Who sang you a song the day before yesterday?"

"You, Malay."

"Who told you a story yesterday?"

"You, Malay."

"And who has already sung you a

song to-day and will tell you a story to-morrow?"

"You, Malay, you again."

"Well then, if it is I who amuse you at your work, and give you more pleasure in smoking, and prevent you from sleeping while your bananas are cooking, it is only right that you should give me, who can make nothing, since I sacrifice myself for your sake, something for my trouble."

The justness of this observation struck everybody; however, our veracity as historians compels us to confess that only a few voices, coming from the hearts of the most fair-minded of their number, answered in the affirmative.

"So," continued Antonio, "it is fair that Toukal should give me a little tobacco to smoke in my pipe, isn't it, Cambeba?"

"Quite fair," cried Cambeba, delighted that not himself but some one else was laid under contribution.

And Toukal was compelled to share his tobacco with Antonio.

"Now the other day," continued Antonio, "I lost my spoon, and had no money to buy another, because, instead of working, I was singing you songs and telling you stories; isn't it fair then that Bonhomme should give me a wooden spoon to eat my soup with? Don't you think so, Toukal?"

"Quite fair," cried Toukal, delighted at not being the only one taxed by Antonio.

And Antonio held out his hand to Bonhomme, who gave him the spoon he had just finished.

"Now," resumed Antonio, "I have tobacco for my pipe, and a spoon to eat my soup with, but I have no money to buy stock—meat. Castor ought therefore to give me that pretty little stool so that I can sell it at market and buy a small piece of beef, oughtn't he, Toukal? oughtn't he, Bonhomme? oughtn't he, Cambeba?"

"Quite right," exclaimed all three.

And Antonio drew, partly with his consent, partly by force, from Castor's hands the stool on which he had just nailed the last piece of bamboo.

"Now," continued Antonio, "I have sung you a song which has already tired me, and am about to tell you a story which will tire me still more. I think I ought to keep up my strength by eating something, don't you, Toukal, and Bonhomme and Castor?"

"Certainly," shouted with one voice the

three who had contributed.—A terrible idea came into Cambeba's mind.

"But," said Antonio, disclosing a double row of grinders, large and shining like a wolf's, "I have nothing to put between my little teeth."

Cambeba felt his hair begin to stand up, and mechanically stretched out his hand towards the fire.

"It is fair then," Antonio went on, "that Cambeba should give me a little banana, isn't it, all of you?"

"Yes, yes, quite fair," cried Toukal, Bonhomme and Castor; "hand over the banana, Cambeba."

And all the voices shouted in chorus:—

"The banana, Cambeba!"

The unhappy man regarded the assemblage with a frightened look and rushed to the fire to rescue his banana; but Antonio stopped him on the way, and, holding him with one hand with a strength of which nobody would have believed him capable, he seized with the other the rope by which the sacks of maize are hauled up to the loft, passed the hook through Cambeba's belt, signalling at the same time to Toukal to pull the other end of the rope. Toukal grasped the situation with a quickness that did credit to his intelligence, and, at the moment when he least expected it, Cambeba found himself lifted from the ground, and, to the great amusement of the company, began to ascend to the sky, twisting round and round. At about ten feet from the ground the ascent ceased, and Cambeba remained suspended, still holding out his shrivelled hands towards the unlucky banana, about which he had no longer any means of arguing with his enemy.

"Bravo, Antonio, well done!" shouted all the spectators, holding their sides with laughter, while Antonio, now perfectly master of the object in dispute, carefully pushed aside the embers and drew out the smoking banana, cooked to perfection and browned fit to make your mouth water.

"My banana, my banana!" cried Cambeba in a tone of the deepest despair.

"Here it is," said Antonio, holding out his arm towards Cambeba.

"Me too far off to take it."

"Don't you want it?"

"Me can't reach down to it."

"Then," replied Antonio, mimicking the language of the hanging wretch, "me eat him to prevent him being spoilt."



And Antonio began to peel the banana with such comic gravity that the laughter became convulsive.

"Antonio," cried Cambeba; "me beg you give me back my banana; banana, him for my poor wife who is ill and can't eat anything else. Me stole him, me wanted him so badly."

"Stolen goods never profit," answered Antonio philosophically, continuing to peel the banana.

"Ah! poor Narina! she will have nothing to eat, and will be very hungry."

"Come, take pity on the unfortunate man," said the young negro of Anjouan, who, in the midst of the general merriment, had alone remained grave and sad.

"Not such a fool," said Antonio.

"I wasn't speaking to you," replied Nazim.

"Who were you speaking to then?"

"I am talking to men."

"Well, I speak to you," replied Antonio, "and I say, hold your tongue, Nazim."

"Untie Cambeba," said the young Negro in a dignified tone that would have done honour to a king.

Toukal, who was holding the rope, turned to Antonio, uncertain if he should obey; but, without answering his questioning look, Antonio continued:—

"I said, hold your tongue, Nazim, and you have not done so."

"When a cur yaps at me I make no reply and go on my way. You are a cur, Antonio."

"Look out for yourself, Nazim," said Antonio, shaking his head; "when your brother Laïza is not here, you are not much good. So I fancy you won't repeat what you said just now."

"You are a cur, Antonio," repeated Nazim, getting up.

All the Negroes who were between Nazim and Antonio made themselves scarce, so that the handsome Anjouan and the hideous Malay found themselves face to face, but at ten paces from each other.

"You say that at a good distance," replied Antonio, grinding his teeth with anger.

"And I repeat it at close quarters," cried Nazim.

And with one bound he came within two paces of Antonio; then, with a contemptuous tone and haughty look, his nostrils dilating, shouted for the third time:—

"You are a cur!"

A white man would have thrown himself upon his enemy and strangled him, if it lay within his power; Antonio, on the contrary, took a step backwards, folded his long limbs, gathered himself up like a snake, drew his knife from his coat pocket and opened it.

Nazim saw the movement and guessed his purpose; but, without deigning to make a gesture of defence, waited, standing erect, dumb and motionless, like the statue of a Nubian deity.

The Malay glanced for an instant at his foe; then raising himself with the suppleness and agility of a snake:—

"Woe to you!" he cried, "Laïza is not here."

"Laïza is here!" said a grave voice.

The man who uttered these words had spoken them in his usual tone; he had not added a gesture, he had not accompanied them by a sign, yet, at the sound of that voice, Antonio stopped dead, and his knife, which was but two inches from Nazim's breast, fell from his hand.

"Laïza!" cried all the Negroes, turning to the new-comer, and assuming in an instant the same attitude of submission.

The man who had but to speak a single word to produce such a powerful impression upon them all, including even Antonio, was in the prime of life, of ordinary height, but his muscular limbs betokened herculean strength. He stood upright, motionless, his arms crossed, and from his eyes, half closed like those of a lion when meditating, there flashed a bright glance, calm and imperious. To see all these men awaiting thus in respectful silence a word or a glance from the other, one would have deemed it a horde of Africans awaiting a nod of the head from their King as a signal for peace or war. Yet he was but a slave among slaves.

After remaining for some minutes motionless as a sculptured figure, Laïza slowly raised his hand and pointed towards Cambeba, who had remained all this time suspended from the end of the rope, surveying dumbly, like the others, the scene that had just passed.

Toukal at once lowered the rope, and Cambeba to his great delight found himself on the ground once more. His first care was to search for the banana which, however, in the confusion that naturally

followed the incident we have just described, had disappeared.

While the search was proceeding, Laïza had gone out, but re-appeared almost immediately, carrying on his shoulders a wild pig, which he threw down by the fire. "Here, my children," said he; "I thought of you; take it and divide it."

This action, and the generous words accompanying it touched two chords in the hearts of the blacks, greediness and enthusiasm, too closely for them not to produce their effect. They all surrounded the animal and gave vent to their ecstasy in their own fashion.

"What a good supper we shall have this evening," said a Malabar.

"Him black as a Mozambique," said a Malagasy.

"Him fat as a Malagasy," said a Mozambique.

But, as may easily be imagined, this kind of admiration was of too ideal a nature not to be soon replaced by something more practical. Before you could say "Jack Robinson" the animal was cut in pieces, half of it put aside for the next day, and the other half carved into fairly thin slices that were laid on the coals, and more solid bits that were roasted before the fire.

Then each went back to his place, but with a brighter face, for each was expecting a nice supper. Cambeba alone stood sadly in a corner.

"What are you doing there, Cambeba?" asked Laïza.

"Me doing nothing, papa Laïza," Cambeba answered sadly. "Papa" is, as everybody knows, a title of honour among the blacks, and all the Negroes on the estate, from the youngest to the oldest, bestowed this title on Laïza.

"Are you still suffering from having been hung up by your belt?" asked the Negro.

"Oh! no, papa, me not so soft as that."

"Then you are vexed?"

This time Cambeba only answered by moving his head up and down in an affirmative manner.

"And why are you vexed?" asked Laïza.

"Antonio, he take my banana which me forced to steal for my wife who is ill, and me have nothing to take her now."

"Well then, give her a bit of this wild pig."

"Her not able to eat meat, no, her no able, papa Laïza."

"Here!" said Laïza in a loud voice, "who can give me a banana?"

A dozen bananas sprang as if by a miracle from beneath the ashes. Laïza took the largest and gave it to Cambeba, who made off without even taking time to say thank you; then turning to Bonhomme, whose banana it was:—

"You shan't lose by it, Bonhomme," he said; "you shall have Antonio's share of meat instead of your banana."

"And what am I going to have?" asked Antonio impudently.

"You shall have the banana which you stole from Cambeba."

"But it's lost," answered the Malay.

"That is not my business."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Negroes, "stolen goods bring no profit."

The Malay got up, glanced at the men who but an instant before had applauded his persecutions and who now applauded his punishment, and left the shed.

"Brother," said Nazim to Laïza, "look after yourself; I know him, he will be doing you some bad turn."

"Look after yourself rather, Nazim; for he would not venture to attack me."

"Well then, I will guard you, and you shall guard me," said Nazim; "but that is not the question now, and we have got, you know, something else to speak about."

"Yes, but not here."

"Come out, then."

"Presently: when they are all busy over their meal, no one will pay any attention to us."

"You are right, brother."

And the two Negroes began to converse in low tones and upon indifferent topics; but, when the slices were grilled, and the pieces of steak roasted, profiting by the close attention always bestowed on the first part of a meal that is seasoned by a good appetite, they both slipped out without the rest of the party noticing their disappearance, exactly as Laïza had foreseen.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RUNAWAY'S TOILET

IT was nearly ten in the evening; the moonless night was fine and starry, as the nights generally are in the tropics towards the end of summer. In the sky



were to be seen some of those constellations with which we are familiar from childhood by the name of the Little Bear, Orion's Belt, and the Pleiades, but in a position so different from that in which we are accustomed to see them, that a European would hardly have recognised them; by way of exchange the Southern Cross, invisible in our northern hemisphere, blazed in the midst of them. The silence of night was broken only by the noise which the numerous woodpeckers, which swarm so plentifully in the neighbourhood of the Black River, made in tapping the bark of the trees, by the song of the blue fig-eaters and the *fondi-jala*, those warbling nightingales of Madagascar, and the almost imperceptible rustle of the dry grass as it bent beneath the feet of the two brothers.

The two Negroes walked in silence, glancing round uneasily from time to time, stopping to listen and then resuming their way. At last, arriving at a more bushy spot, they entered a sort of little bamboocopse, and, having reached its centre, they halted, still listening and looking around them again. The result of this last examination was doubtless more reassuring than the previous ones, for they exchanged a look that indicated that all was safe, and both sat down at the foot of a wild banana, that spread its broad leaves, like a magnificent fan, among the slender leaves of the roses which surrounded it.

"Well, brother?" asked Nazim, with that feeling of impatience which Laïza had always checked when the other had wished to question him in the hearing of the other Negroes.

"You are still in the same mind, Nazim?" said Laïza.

"More than ever, brother. I should die, you see, if I stayed here. I have hardened my heart to work up to now, I, Nazim, a Chief's son, and your brother. But I am weary of this wretched life; I must go back to Anjouan or die."

Laïza uttered a sigh.

"Anjouan is a long way from here," said he.

"What does it matter?" answered Nazim.

"It is the stormy time of year."

"The wind will drive us all the faster."

"But if the boat capsizes?"

"We will swim as long as we have strength; then, when we can swim no longer, we will take a last look at the sky

where the Great Spirit is waiting for us, and sink to the bottom in each other's arms."

"Alas!" said Laïza.

"That would be better than being a slave," said Nazim.

"So you want to leave the Isle of France?"

"I do."

"At the risk of your life?"

"At the risk of my life."

"It is ten to one you never reach Anjouan."

"There is one chance to ten that I do."

"Very well;" said Laïza; "be it as you wish, my brother. But think over it again."

"I have been thinking over it for two years. When the Chief of the Mongallos captured me in battle, as you yourself had been captured four years previously, and sold me to the Captain of a slave-ship, as you yourself had been sold, I made up my mind that very instant. I was put in chains, I tried to strangle myself with my chains, so they riveted me to a bulkhead in the hold. Then I wanted to beat out my brains against the ship's side, so they spread straw under my head. Then I was for letting myself die of hunger, so they opened my mouth, and, not being able to make me eat, forced me to drink. They were obliged to sell me quickly, they landed me here and got rid of me at half price, and even that was dear; for I was determined to throw myself from the first cliff that I should climb. All at once, I heard your voice, brother; all at once, I felt my heart beat against your heart, I felt my lips on your lips, and I felt so happy that I thought I could live. That lasted for a year. Then, brother, forgive me, your friendship was not enough for me. I remembered our island, I remembered my father, and Zirna. Our labour seemed to me first wearisome, then humiliating, then intolerable. Then I said to myself that I wanted to flee, to go back to Anjouan, to see Zirna again, and my father, and our island; and you were kind to me, as ever, and said 'Rest yourself, Nazim, you who are weak, and I, who am strong, will work.' Then you went out every evening, for four days, and worked while I rested. Did you not, Laïza?"

"Yes, Nazim, but listen: you had better wait a bit longer," replied Laïza, raising his forehead. "Slaves to-day, in a month,

in three months, in a year, we shall perhaps be masters!"

"Yes," said Nazim; "yes, I know your plans; yes, I know your hope."

"Then, you understand what it would be," resumed Laïza, "to see these whites, so proud and cruel, humiliated and suppliants in their turn? to make them work twelve hours a day? to beat them, lash them with whips, and bruise them with sticks?"

"They are but twelve thousand, and there are eighty thousand of us. And on the day when we come to settle accounts, they will be lost."

"I will say to you what you said to me, Laïza; it is ten to one that you do not succeed . . ."

"But I will answer you as you answered me, Nazim; there is one chance to ten that I do. Let us wait then . . ."

"I cannot, Laïza, I cannot . . . I have seen my mother's spirit; she told me to return to my country."

"You have seen it?" said Laïza.

"Yes; every evening for a fortnight, a *fondi-jala* has come and perched above my head; it is the same one that sang at Anjouan over her grave. It has crossed the sea with its little wings, and has come here. I recognised its song; listen, it is here."

And at that very moment a Madagascar nightingale, perched on the highest branch in the mass of trees beneath which Laïza and Nazim were lying, began its melodious song above the heads of the two brothers. Both listened, bending their heads sadly, until the nocturnal songster broke off, and, flying in the direction of the native land of the two slaves, uttered the same strains at a distance of fifty yards; then, flying off again, still in the same direction, repeated for the last time its song, as a distant echo from their country, of which, at this distance, they could only just catch the highest notes; then, once more, it flew away, but this time so far, that the two exiles listened in vain; they could hear its song no more.

"It has gone back to Anjouan," said Nazim; "and it will return in the same way to call me and show me the way, until I return myself."

"Go then," said Laïza.

"Now?" asked Nazim.

"Everything is ready. I have chosen the largest tree I could find in one of the most deserted spots near the Black River;

I have hollowed out a canoe in its trunk, and have cut two oars out of its branches. I have sawed it through above and below the canoe, but I have left it standing for fear lest its top should be seen missing among the other tree tops. Now all that is left is to push it over, to drag the canoe to the river and launch it in the stream. Since you will go, Nazim, well, you shall go to-night."

"And you, my brother, are you not coming with me?" asked Nazim.

"No," said Laïza; "I remain behind."

Nazim in his turn heaved a deep sigh.

"And what hinders you then," asked Nazim, after a moment's silence, "from returning with me to the land of our forefathers?"

"I have told you, Nazim, what hinders me; for more than a year we have been determined to rise in revolt, and our friends have chosen me as their leader. I cannot betray our friends by leaving them."

"It is not that which keeps you back, brother," said Nazim, shaking his head; "there is something besides."

"And what else do you suppose can keep me back, Nazim?"

"The Rose of the Black River," answered the young man, looking fixedly at Laïza.

Laïza started; then, after a moment's silence:—

"It is true," he said; "I love her."

"Poor brother!" replied Nazim. "And what is your plan?"

"I have none."

"What is your hope?"

"To see her to-morrow, as I saw her yesterday, as I saw her to-day."

"But she, does she know of your existence?"

"I doubt it."

"Has she ever spoken a word to you?"

"Never."

"Then what of your country?"

"I have forgotten it."

"Nessali?"

"I remember her no longer."

"Our father?"

Laïza let his head sink into his hands. Then, after an instant:—

"Listen," he said. "All you can say to make me go is as vain as all that I have said to make you stay. She is everything to me, family and country! I must see her, to live, just as I must have the air that she breathes, to breathe. Let us each follow our own destiny. For you,



Nazim, the return to Anjouan ; for me, to remain here."

"But what shall I say to my father, when he asks me why Laïza has not returned?"

"You will tell him that Laïza is dead," answered the Negro in a choking voice.

"He will not believe me," said Nazim, shaking his head.

"Why not?"

"He will say to me, 'If my son were dead, I should have seen my son's spirit: the spirit of Laïza has not visited his father: Laïza is not dead.'"

"Well then, you will tell him that I love a white girl," said Laïza, "and he will curse me. But never will I quit the Island where she is!"

"The Great Spirit will inspire me, my brother," answered Nazim, rising; "take me to the canoe."

"Wait," said Laïza.

And the Negro went up to a hollow maple tree, drew from it a piece of glass and a gourd filled with cocoa-oil.

What is that?" asked Nazim.

"Listen, my brother," said Laïza: "it is possible that with the help of a good wind and your oars you may, in eight or ten days, reach Madagascar, or even the Continent of Africa; but it is possible that to-morrow, or the day after, a storm may throw you back on this coast. Then your departure will be known, then signals about you will have been sent all over the Island, then you will be obliged to play the runaway, and fly from wood to wood, from rock to rock."

"Brother, I was called the stag of Anjouan, as you were called the lion," said Nazim.

"Yes, but, like the stag, you may fall into a trap. Then it will be needful for you to give them no hold upon you; you will have to slip through their hands. Here is some glass to cut your hair with, and some cocoa-oil to grease your limbs. Come, brother, let me perform the toilet of the runaway Negro."

Nazim and Laïza made for a thinner part of the wood, and Laïza began, by the light of the stars, with the help of his broken piece of glass bottle to cut his brother's hair as quickly and as thoroughly as the most skilful barber with the sharpest razor could have done it. When the operation was finished, Nazim threw off his jacket, while his brother poured over his shoulders a portion of the cocoa-oil

contained in the gourd, and the young fellow spread it with his hands over every portion of his body. Thus anointed from head to foot, the handsome Anjouan Negro looked like an antique athlete prepared for the race.

But, in order quite to satisfy Laïza, an experiment was required. Like Alcides of old, Laïza could grasp a horse by his hind feet, and the horse would try in vain to escape from his hands. Laïza, like Milo of Croton, could take a bull by his horns and throw him over his shoulder or knock him down at his feet. If Nazim could escape from Laïza, he could escape from everybody: accordingly, Laïza seized Nazim by the arm, tightening his fingers with all the strength of his iron muscles. Nazim pulled his arm away and it slipped through the fingers of Laïza like an eel in a fisherman's hands. Laïza seized Nazim by the middle, pressing him against his breast as Hercules pressed Antæus; Nazim placed his hands on Laïza's shoulders and slipped between his arms and breast just as a snake slips between the claws of a lion. Then, and not till then, was the Negro satisfied; Nazim could not be captured by a surprise, and, if it came to a chase, Nazim himself could outlast the stag from which he took his name.

Then Laïza gave Nazim the gourd three parts filled with cocoa-oil, bidding him keep it even more carefully than the roots of manioc for appeasing his hunger, and the water to quench his thirst. Nazim passed his strap through the gourd and fastened it to his girdle.

Then the two brothers examined the sky, and, seeing from the position of the stars that it must be midnight at least, took the road by the hill of the *Rivière Noire*, and soon disappeared into the woods that clothe the base of the *Trois-Mamelles*. But behind them, at twenty paces from the mass of bamboos, where the conversation which we have just related took place, a man who, from his absolute immobility, might have been taken for one of the tree-trunks among which he lay, slipped like a ghost into the underwood, appeared for an instant on the edge of the forest, and, making a menacing gesture after the two brothers, went off, as soon as they had disappeared, in the direction of Port-Louis.

It was the Malay, Antonio, who had promised to be revenged on Laïza and

Nazim, and who was going to keep his word.

And now, quick as he may travel with his long legs, we must, if our readers permit, precede him to the capital of the Isle of France

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ROSEBUD OF THE RIVIERE NOIRE

AFTER paying Miko-Miko for the fan, the price of which, to her great astonishment, Georges had found out for her, the girl, of whom we had a momentary glimpse at the door of her house, ordered her Negro to help the Chinaman to pack up his wares, and went in, followed, of course, by her governess. She was quite delighted with her new acquisition, which, nevertheless, was fated to be forgotten the very next day. She now went, with that undulating and unconstrained gait which adds so much charm to Creole women, and lay down on a large sofa, which was evidently intended to be used either as a bed or as a lounge. This piece of furniture was placed at one end of a charming little boudoir, filled to overflowing with many coloured Chinese porcelains and Japanese vases; the hangings which covered the walls were made of that fine printed calico which the inhabitants of the Isle of France get from the Coromandel coast, and which is called patna. The chairs, as is usual in hot countries, were made of cane, and two windows at opposite sides of the room, the one opening on the main court which was full of trees, the other on a large back enclosure, allowed the sea breeze and the scent of flowers to penetrate freely through the bamboo mats which served as shutters.

Hardly had the girl stretched herself on the sofa, when a small green parrot with a grey head, as plump as a sparrow, flew from its perch, and, alighting on her shoulder, amused itself by picking the end of the fan which its mistress, amusing herself in her turn, was opening and shutting mechanically.

We say *mechanically*, for it was manifest the girl was no longer thinking about

her fan, charming though it was, and greatly as she had desired to possess it. Her eyes, fixed apparently on some part of the room where there seemed to be no special object to account for her steady gaze, had evidently ceased to take in objects present to her sight, in order to pursue some internal train of thought. Nay more; this internal vision evidently possessed for her all the appearance of reality; for, from time to time, a slight smile passed over her face, and her lips moved, answering in dumb language to some mute remembrance. This preoccupation was too foreign to the girl's usual manner not to be noticed by her governess; so, after having watched in silence for some moments her pupil's play of features, Henrietta asked:—

"What is the matter, Sara, dear?"

"Nothing," answered the girl starting like a person aroused from sleep. "I am playing, as you see, with my parrot and my fan, that's all."

"Yes, I can see you are playing with your parrot and your fan: but I am certain that, at the moment when I disturbed you in your reverie, you were not thinking of either one or the other."

"Oh! my dear Henrietta, I declare to you. . . ."

"You don't usually tell fibs, Sara, and least of all to me," interrupted the governess; "why begin to-day?"

The girl blushed deeply; then, after a moment's hesitation:—

"You are right, dear creature," said she; "I was thinking of something quite different."

"And what were you thinking of?"

"I was wondering who that young man could be who passed by at such an opportune moment and got us out of our difficulty. I have never seen him before to-day, and no doubt he came with the vessel that brought the Governor. Is there any harm in thinking about him?"

"No, my child, there is no harm in thinking about him, but it was an untruth to tell me that you were thinking of something else."

"I was wrong," said the girl, "forgive me." And she turned her charming head to the governess, who stooped towards her and kissed her on the forehead.

Both were silent for a moment, then, as Henrietta, like the strictly conscientious Englishwoman that she was, did not like to allow her pupil's imagination to linger



too long on the recollection of a young man, and as Sara, on her part, experienced a certain embarrassment in being silent, they both opened their mouths at the same instant. Thus their first words clashed, and each stopping short in order to let the other speak, the result was another interval of silence, broken this time by Sara.

"What were you going to say, my dear Henrietta?" asked the girl.

"Nay, you were saying something yourself, Sara. What was it?"

"I was going to say I should like to know if your new Governor is a young man."

"I suppose you would be very glad if he were young?"

"Of course. If he is young, he will give dinners, and fêtes, and balls, and that will wake up our dull Port-Louis a little. Oh! balls, especially,—if he would only give balls."

"You are fond, then, of dancing, my child?"

"Oh! am I not?" cried the girl.

Henrietta smiled.

"Is there any harm then in being fond of dancing?"

"There is harm, Sara, in running to extremes in everything, as you do."

"Can I help it, dear?" said Sara, in a sweetly coaxing manner, which she could assume on occasions, "I am made that way; I like or I dislike, and I cannot hide either my liking or my disliking. Haven't you often told me pretence was a wicked sin?"

"No doubt; but there is a vast difference between disguising one's feelings and yielding unceasingly to one's desires, I might almost say to one's natural instincts," replied the severe Englishwoman, who was sometimes as much embarrassed by the ready-witted arguments of her pupil, as she was alarmed at other times by the outbursts of her wild nature.

"Yes, I know you have often told me that, dear. I know that European women, those of the fashionable world at least, steer in a wonderful way between frankness and concealment by means of reticence of speech and immobility of feature. But, dear, from me you must not expect too much; I am not a civilised girl, but a little savage, reared in the wide forests and on the banks of great rivers. When I see anything that pleases me, I want it, and, if I want it I must have it. Then,

you see, I have been rather spoilt, by you too, dear Henrietta, among the rest; which has made me wilful. When I have asked for things, they have generally been given to me; and, when it has happened that I have been refused, I have taken them, and have been allowed to."

"And, such being your disposition, how shall you manage when you are M. Henri's wife?"

"Oh! Henri is a good fellow; we have already agreed," said Sara, with the most perfect simplicity, "that I shall let him do as he pleases, and that I, too, shall do as I please. Haven't we, Henri?" continued Sara, turning to the door, which opened at this moment to admit M. de Malmédie and his son.

"What is it, Sara dear?" asked the young man, going up and kissing her hand.

"Haven't we agreed that, when we are married, you will never oppose me, and will give me everything I want?"

"Upon my word!" said M. de Malmédie, "I hope this young lady knows how to make her conditions beforehand!"

"Haven't we agreed," continued Sara, "that if I like to be always going to balls, you will take me to them and stay as long as I wish, and not be like those wretched husbands who go off after the seventh or eighth dance? that I may sing as much as I like, and go fishing as much as I like; and that if I want a nice hat from Paris, or a nice English or Arab horse, you will buy them for me?"

"Oh! of course," said Henri, smiling, "but, talking of Arab horses, we saw two fine ones to-day, and I am glad you did not see them, Sara; for as they are probably not for sale, I could not have given them to you, if you had happened to take a fancy to them."

"I saw them too," said Sara; "they belong, do they not, to a dark young stranger of twenty-five or twenty-six, with fine hair and splendid eyes?"

"Confound it, Sara," said Henri; "you seem to have paid even more attention to the rider than to the horses."

"It is easily explained, Henri; the gentleman came up and spoke to me, while the horses I saw only at a certain distance, and they did not even neigh!"

"That young fop spoke to you, Sara? and why?"

"In the first place," said Sara, "I noticed no signs of foppishness about him

at all, nor did my dear Henrietta, who was with me. Next, you ask why he spoke to me? Oh! good gracious! nothing more simple. I was returning from church, when I saw waiting for me at the doorstep a Chinaman with his two baskets filled with boxes, fans, pocket books, and a host of other things. I asked him the price of this fan. . . look how pretty it is, Henri"—

"Well, go on," said M. de Malmédie; "all this has nothing to do with the stranger's speaking to you."

"I am coming to it directly, uncle," answered Sara. "I asked him the price of the fan, but his answer gave us some trouble, for the worthy man spoke nothing but Chinese. Then Henrietta and I were quite at a loss, and asked those who were standing round us looking at the beautiful wares displayed by the dealer, if there was no one who could act as our interpreter, when this young man came forward and placed himself at our service, spoke to the Chinaman in his own language, and, coming back to us, said, 'Ninety dollars.' It isn't, dear uncle, is it?"

"Ahem!" said M. de Malmédie; "it is the price we paid for a Negro before the English put a stop to the trade."

"Then this gentleman speaks Chinese?" asked Henri in astonishment.

"Yes," answered Sara.

"Just fancy, father," cried Henri, bursting into laughter, "he speaks Chinese."

"Well, is there anything to laugh at in that?" asked Sara.

"Oh, nothing at all," replied Henri, continuing to give way to merriment. "Why, this is a charming accomplishment possessed by the handsome foreigner. He can chat with the tea-chests and folding-screens."

"The act is that Chinese is a very little-known tongue," answered M. de Malmédie.

"He must be some mandarin," said Henri, continuing to enjoy himself at the expense of the stranger, whose haughty look had rankled in his mind.

"At any rate," answered Sara, "he is an educated mandarin; for, after speaking Chinese to the dealer, he spoke French to me, and English to my dear Henrietta."

"Hang it! The fellow speaks every language," said M. de Malmédie. "He is just the sort of man I want in my office."

"Unfortunately, uncle," said Sara, "the

person of whom you are speaking seems to be in a service that will give him a distaste for all other employments."

"What is that?"

"In that of the King of France. Didn't you notice that he wears in his button-hole the riband of the Legion of Honour, and another riband besides?"

"Oh! these ribands are bestowed now-a-days without its being necessary for the recipient to have seen service."

"But still, speaking generally, the man who gets them must be a person of note," replied Sara, vexed without knowing why, and defending the stranger by that instinct, so natural to simple hearts, of defending those who are unjustly attacked.

"Well," said Henri, "he must have been decorated for knowing Chinese, that's all."

"Anyhow, we shall know all this soon," replied M. de Malmédie in a tone that showed that he did not notice the quarrel between the young people; "for he arrived on board the Governor's ship, and, as people do not come to the Isle of France to leave it next day, we shall no doubt have the advantage of having him with us for some time."

At this moment a servant entered with a letter that bore the Governor's seal, and which had just come from Lord Murray. It was an invitation for M. de Malmédie, Henri, and Sara, to the dinner which would take place on the following Monday, and to the ball that would follow the dinner.

Sara's uncertainties were at once decided in respect to the Governor. He must be a most delightful man who started by giving invitations for a dinner and a ball, and Sara uttered a cry of joy at the thought of spending a whole night in dancing.

This fell out the more opportunely as the last vessel from France had brought her some lovely trimmings of artificial flowers, which had not given her half the pleasure they ought to have done, since she did not know, when she received them, what opportunity she would get of showing them off.

As for Henri, in spite of the dignity with which he received the news, he was not, at heart, indifferent to it. Henry regarded himself as one of the best-looking young men of the Colony, and, although he was engaged and his marriage with his cousin quite settled upon, he lost no



opportunity meanwhile of flirting with other women. Besides, this was not difficult for him, as Sara, whether from indifference or habit, showed not the slightest jealousy in this respect.

As for his father, he was extremely proud when he saw the invitation, which he read three times, and which gave him a still higher idea of his own importance at finding himself, two or three hours after the Governor's arrival, invited to dinner with him, an honour which in all probability was extended only to the most considerable personages in the Island.

The invitation, however, necessitated some change in the family plans. Henri had arranged a grand stag-hunt for the Sunday and Monday following in the district of the *Savane*, which, at this period, being still uninhabited, abounded in big game. Moreover as the hunt was to take place partly over his father's property, he had invited some dozen of his friends to meet on the Sunday morning at a charming country-house which he owned on the banks of the *Rivière Noire*, one of the most picturesque parts of the Island. It was impossible to keep to the days agreed upon, seeing that one of these days was that selected by the Governor for his ball, so it became necessary to ante-date the party by twenty-four hours, not only on account of the Malmédies, but also for some of their guests who would no doubt have the honour of being asked to dine with Lord Murray. So Henri went to his room to write some dozen letters, telling the sportsmen of the change made in their original plan, and which Bijou was ordered to deliver at their respective addresses. M. de Malmédie, in his turn, took leave of Sara, making the excuse of a business-meeting, but in reality to announce to his neighbours that in three days he would be able to give them frankly his opinion of their new Governor, inasmuch as he was dining with him the following Monday.

As for Sara, she declared that, in these unexpected and serious circumstances, she had so many preparations to make that she would be unable to start with them on the Saturday morning, and would be content with joining them on Saturday evening or Sunday morning.

The rest of that day, then, and all the next, was spent, as Sara had foreseen, in preparations for the important evening,

and, thanks to the calm and method which Henrietta imported into all the arrangements, Sara was ready to start on Sunday morning, as she had promised her uncle. The most important matter, the trying on of the frock, was finished, and the dress-maker, a trustworthy woman, undertook that Sara should find it completed next morning; if anything wanted alteration, there remained part of the day to do it in.

So Sara started in the most joyous frame of mind possible. Next to a ball, what she loved best in the world was the country; there she felt free to be idle or to rush about at will,—a freedom which she, so fond of running to opposite extremes, never quite found in the town. Besides, when in the country, Sara ceased to recognise any authority, even that of her dear Henrietta, the person who, after all, had the most influence over her. If she was in an idle mood, she chose a beautiful spot, lay down beneath a clump of jameroses or shaddocks, and there lived like the flowers, drinking in the dew, the air, and the sunshine at every pore, listening to the songs of the blue fig-eaters and *fondi-jala*, amusing herself with watching the monkeys leaping from bough to bough or hanging by their tails, following with her eyes the graceful and rapid movements of the pretty green lizards speckled and striped with red, that are so common in the Isle of France that at every step you disturb three or four of them. There she would remain whole hours, putting herself in communication, so to speak, with all nature, to whose thousand voices she listened, whose thousand aspects she studied, whose thousand harmonies she compared. If, on the other hand, she was in an active mood, then she was no longer a girl, but a gazelle, a bird, or a butterfly; she jumped the streams in pursuit of dragon-flies with heads sparkling like rubies; she hung over the cliff to gather the broad-leaved lilies, on which the dew-drops quiver like globules of quick-silver; she sped, like a water-fairy, beneath a waterfall whose damp spray shrouded her as with a gauzy veil, and then her cheeks, in marked contrast to the other Creole girls whose dull tint so seldom takes colour, would be flushed with so vivid a pink, that the Negroes, accustomed in their poetic and flowery language to give a descriptive name to everything, called Sara the Rosebud of the Dark River.

So Sara, as we have said, was very happy, since she had in prospect, one for that very day, the other for the day following, the two things she loved best in the world, to wit the country and the dance.

## CHAPTER X

### A PERILOUS BATHE

AT this period the Island was not, as it is to-day, intersected by roads on which you may travel by carriage to the different parts of the Colony, and the only means of transport were horses or the palanquin. Whenever Sara went into the country with Henri or M. de Malmédie, horses were preferred without any discussion, for riding was one of the exercises with which the girl was most familiar. But when she travelled in company with Henrietta this method of locomotion had to be abandoned, since Henrietta much preferred the palanquin. So it was in a palanquin carried by four Negroes, followed by a relay of four others, that Sara and her governess travelled side by side, sufficiently close to one another to be able to talk through the drawn curtains, while their bearers, assured beforehand of a *pourboire*, sang at the top of their voices, announcing thus to the passers-by the liberality of their young mistress.

Henrietta and Sara presented the most complete contrast, physical and moral, that can be imagined. The reader is already acquainted with Sara, the capricious girl with dark hair and eyes, complexion as changeful as her mind, with pearly teeth, hands and feet small as a child's, and body supple and undulating as a sylph's. He must now allow us to say a few words about Henrietta.

Henrietta Smith was born in London; her father was a teacher who, having intended her for the teaching profession, had had her instructed from childhood in Italian and French, which, thanks to this early study, were as familiar to her as her mother tongue. Teaching, as everybody knows, is an employment in which as a rule large fortunes are not made. Jack

Smith then, died a poor man, leaving his daughter Henrietta very highly accomplished, but without a dowry, and in consequence this young lady attained the age of twenty-five without finding a husband.

Just then, one of her friends, an excellent musician, as she herself was a perfect linguist, proposed to Miss Smith to amalgamate their talents and start a school in partnership. The offer was accepted. But, though each of the two partners gave every attention and all the pains and devotion of which they were capable to the education of the pupils who were entrusted to them, the establishment did not prosper, and the two mistresses were obliged to dissolve partnership.

Meanwhile, the father of one of Miss Smith's pupils, a rich London merchant, received from M. de Malmédie, a correspondent of his, a letter asking him for a governess for his niece, offering her advantages sufficient to compensate her for the sacrifice she would make in expatriating herself. The contents of this letter were communicated to Henrietta. The poor girl was without resources; she was not wedded to a country where she had no other prospect than that of dying of starvation. She looked upon the offer made to her as a blessing from heaven, and embarked on the first vessel sailing for the Isle of France, recommended to M. de Malmédie as a lady worthy of the highest respect. M. de Malmédie consequently received her, and entrusted her with the education of his niece Sara, who was then nine years old.

Miss Henrietta's first question was to ask M. de Malmédie what sort of education he wished his niece to receive. M. de Malmédie answered that that did not in the least matter; that he had engaged a governess to free him from anxiety on this score, and that it was her business, having been recommended to him as a very intelligent person, to teach Sara what she knew; adding only, by way of afterthought, that the girl being definitely intended as the future wife of her cousin Henri, it was important that she should not conceive an affection for any one else. This decision of M. de Malmédie's in regard to the union of his son and niece was influenced, not only by the affection which he had for both, but still more by the fact that Sara, who had been left an



orphan at the age of three, had inherited nearly a million francs, a sum which would double itself during M. de Malmédie's guardianship.

Sara at first stood in great awe of this governess who had come from over seas, and it must be admitted that, at first sight, the appearance of Miss Smith did not greatly re-assure her. She was at that time a tall woman of thirty or thirty-two, to whom school work had imparted that dry, stiff look so often to be seen in ladies engaged in education; her cold eye, pale complexion and thin lips gave her a wonderfully wooden appearance, the frigidity of which was only partly redeemed by the warmth of her auburn hair. From early morning fully dressed and with hair neatly done up, Sara had never once seen her carelessly attired, and for a long time believed that Miss Henrietta, instead of going to bed at night like ordinary people, was hung up in a wardrobe as dolls are, and came out in the morning just as she had entered it the evening before. The consequence was that in early days Sara was fairly obedient to her governess, and learned a little English and Italian. As for music, Sara was constituted like a nightingale, and played the piano and guitar almost by instinct, though the instrument she preferred to all others was the Malagasy harp, from which she drew sounds which delighted the most famous virtuosos of Madagascar in the Island.

Sara had made all this progress, however, without losing any of her individuality, or her primitive nature being in any degree modified, while Miss Henrietta, on her side, remained such as God and education had made her; so that these two beings, so widely different, lived side by side without ever yielding to each other. Still, as both, in their different ways, were endowed with excellent qualities, Henrietta came to form a deep attachment for her pupil, and Sara, in her turn, entertained a lively friendship for her governess, and the token of this mutual affection was that the teacher called Sara "my child," while Sara, thinking the title of "Miss" or "Mademoiselle" too cold for the affection she bore to her governess, invented the more affectionate address of "ma mie Henriette."

But it was especially in regard to physical exercises that Henrietta maintained her feeling of dislike. Her education, exclusively scholastic, had only

developed her moral faculties, leaving her bodily faculties in their natural clumsiness, so, however much Sara might try to persuade her, Henrietta had never cared to ride, even on Berloque, a quiet Java pony that carried vegetables for the gardener. The narrow roads made her feel so giddy that she had often preferred to make a détour of a mile or two rather than pass close to a precipice. It was not without deep searchings of the heart that she went on board ship, and scarcely had she sat down, and the aforesaid ship begun to move, than the poor governess declared she was overtaken by sea-sickness, which did not leave her for a moment during the whole voyage from Portsmouth to Port-Louis, that is to say for more than four months. The result was that Henrietta's life was passed in perpetual apprehension in regard to Sara; when she saw her ride with the boldness of an Amazon, with her cousin, or bounding with the lightness of a fawn from rock to rock, or gliding with the grace of a water-nymph on the surface of the water, or disappearing for a moment in its depths, her poor heart was wrung with a terror almost maternal. She was like those unfortunate hens who have hatched swans, and who, seeing their adopted progeny plunge into the water, remain on the edge of the bank, unable to understand such boldness, and clucking sadly to call back the rash young ones who are exposing themselves to such awful danger.

So Henrietta, though for the moment carried quite comfortably and safely in a palanquin, was none the less already anticipating the countless agonies which Sara, according to her wont, would make her go through, while the young girl was elated at the thought of these two days of happiness.

The morning, too, was magnificent. It was one of those beautiful days at the beginning of autumn (for the month of May, which is our spring time, is autumn in the Isle of France), when nature, getting ready to hide herself behind a veil of rain, pays the sweetest adieux to the sunshine. As they advanced, the country grew wilder and wilder; they crossed, by bridges, the fragility of which made Henrietta tremble, the double source of the river of the *Rampart*, and the falls of the Tamarin. On reaching the foot of the *Trois-Mamelles* mountain, Sara made enquiries about her uncle and cousin, and

heard that they were at that moment hunting with their friends between the big pool and the plain of St. Pierre. Finally, they crossed the little river of the *Boucaut*, rounded the hill of the great *Rivière Noire*, and found themselves facing M. de Malmédie's abode.

Sara began by paying a visit to the inmates of the house, whom she had not seen for a fortnight; then she went off to say good morning to her aviary, a large enclosure of wire netting that surrounded an entire thicket, in which were confined together Guida turtle-doves, blue and grey fig-eaters, *fondi-jala*, and fly-catchers. From there she went on to her flowers, almost all brought from London; there were tuberoses, carnations, anemones, ranunculuses, and Indian roses, while in the middle of them the beautiful Cape immortelle reared its head as queen of the flowers. All these were enclosed by hedges of jasmine and China roses, which latter, like our roses of the four seasons, bloom the whole year round. This was Sara's kingdom; the whole island was her conquest. So long as Sara remained in the grounds belonging to the house, all went well for Henrietta, who enjoyed the gravel paths, the cool shade, and the air redolent with perfumes. But you may guess that this period of tranquillity was very brief. By the time Sara had said a kind word or two to the old mulatto woman who had been in her service and was spending her declining years by the banks of the *Rivière Noire*, by the time she had kissed her favourite dove, and gathered a few flowers to put in her hair, this part of the day's proceedings was over. Then came the turn for the walk, and then began the anguish of the unhappy governess. At first, Henrietta tried to oppose the child's independent spirit and limit her to amusements that involved less roaming about, but she soon recognised that this was an impossibility. Sara had escaped from her hands and made her excursions without her; so that, at last, her anxiety for her pupil proving greater than her fears for her own safety, she made up her mind to accompany her. It is true she nearly always contented herself with sitting on some point of vantage from which she could follow the girl with her eyes as she climbed up hill or down, but at least she seemed to be checking her by gestures and keeping her in sight. On this occasion, seeing Sara prepared to

start, she resigned herself as usual, took a book to read, while Sara ran about, and got ready to accompany her.

But Sara had planned something else than a walk this time; she had promised herself a bathe in the beautiful, calm, and peaceful bay of the *Rivière Noire*, the water in which was so clear that at a depth of twenty feet you could see the polypes which grew at the bottom, and the different tribes of shell-fish crawling among their branches. But Sara had taken good care, as usual, to give no hint of her intention to Henrietta; only the old mulatto woman had been told, and she was to wait for Sara with her bathing-dress at the place which she had pointed out.

So Sara and her governess descended, following the banks of the *Rivière Noire*, which continually grew wider, and at the end of which could be seen the bay shining like a vast mirror. On each side of the stream rose a high bank of woods, the trees of which shot up, like tall pillars, seeking for air and sun, in the midst of a vast dome of leaves so thick that the sky could only here and there be seen; while their roots, like countless snakes, unable to dig into the rocks which are continually rolling down from the top of the hill, surrounded them with their folds. In proportion as the bed of the river widened, the trees on the two banks bent over, profiting by the space left by the water, and formed an arch like a gigantic tent; the effect of the whole was sombre, desolate, peaceful, and silent, full of romantic sadness and mysterious calm. The only sound to be heard was the harsh cry of the grey-headed parrot; the only living creatures to be seen, as far as the eye could reach, were some of those reddish monkeys called aigrettes, which are the scourge of the plantations, but are so common in the island that all attempts to exterminate them have failed. Only from time to time, scared by the noise made by Sara and her governess, a green kingfisher with white throat and breast, darted, with a shrill and plaintive cry, from the mangroves which dipped their boughs in the river, crossed the stream swift as an arrow, shining like an emerald, plunged into the mangroves on the opposite bank and disappeared. This tropical vegetation, this profound solitude, these wild harmonies, so much in keeping with each other, rocks, trees, and river,



all this was nature as Sara loved it; it was the country as her primitive imagination understood it; it was a panorama such as neither pen, nor crayon, nor brush could reproduce, but such as her soul reflected it.

Let us hasten to say that Henrietta was not insensible to this magnificent spectacle; but, as we know, her perpetual fear prevented her thorough enjoyment of it. So having reached the top of a small hill which commanded a fairly wide prospect, she sat down, and after having, though without hope of success, invited Sara to sit beside her, she saw the girl bound away from her side, and, drawing from her pocket the tenth or twelfth volume of "*Clarissa Harlowe*," her favourite novel, began to read it for the twentieth time.

The girl proceeded to the bank of the river, springing from rock to rock like a wag-tail admiring itself in the water; then, after satisfying herself with the timid modesty of a nymph of olden days, that there was no one in sight of her, she began to let all her garments slip off her one after the other, and put on a white woollen tunic, which, drawn tight round the neck and below the bosom, and coming down to the knees, left her arms and legs bare, and consequently free to move. Standing thus in her fresh costume, the girl resembled Diana the huntress ready to enter her bath.

Sara advanced to the edge of a rock which overhung the bay, at a spot where the water was very deep; then boldly, and with confidence in her skill and strength, certain of her superiority over an element in which she had been, in some degree, born, like Venus, she plunged in, disappeared beneath the water, and came up again, swimming at some yards from the place where she had jumped in. All at once Henrietta heard a call, and, raising her head looked all round her; then her eyes, directed by a second call, lighted on the fair bather, and she saw her water-nymph in the middle of the bay gliding on the surface of the water. Her first impulse was to recall Sara, but knowing that that would be trouble thrown away, she contented herself with giving her pupil a reproachful gesture, and, getting up, she approached the river bank as closely as the slope of the rock on which she had been sitting allowed.

At this moment her attention was for the moment distracted by signals which Sara was making. While swimming with one hand, Sara pointed with the other to the depths of the wood to indicate that something fresh was taking place beneath those sombre arches of verdure. Henrietta listened, and heard the distant baying of a pack of hounds. After an instant the baying seemed to her to come closer, and she was confirmed in this opinion by fresh signals from Sara; the sound, in fact, became more and more distinct, and presently could be heard the sound of feet rushing through the depths of the forest. At last, all of a sudden, at two hundred yards above the spot where Henrietta was seated, a fine stag was seen to crash through the branches and burst out of the forest, spring with one bound over the river, and disappear on the other side. After an instant, the hounds in their turn appeared, jumped the river at the spot where the stag had jumped it, and, hotly pursuing the scent, disappeared into the forest.

Sara had shared their spectacle with all the delight of a keen lover of the chase. So, when the stag and hounds had disappeared, she gave a cry of pleasure; but this cry was answered by a shout of terror so deep and heart-rending that Henrietta turned in amazement. The old mulatto woman, standing on the bank, like a statue of wonder, was pointing her arms to an enormous shark that with the aid of the flood-tide, had cleared the barrier reef, and, scarcely sixty yards from Sara, was swimming on the surface of the water towards her. The governess had not even the strength to cry out, but fell upon her knees.

On hearing the woman's shout, Sara had turned and seen the danger that threatened her. Then, with admirable presence of mind, she made for the nearest point of the shore. But this point was at least forty yards off, and, no matter with what skill and strength she swam, the monster seemed likely to overtake her before she could reach land.

At this moment another shout was heard, and a Negro, clasping a long dagger between his teeth, rushed through the middle of the mangroves that bordered the shore, and, with one spring, covered nearly half the width of the bay. Then, instantly beginning to swim with almost superhuman strength, he tried to inter-

cept the shark, which all this time, as if sure of his prey, was advancing, without quickening the movements of his tail, towards the girl, who, turning her head at each stroke, could see her foe and her defender coming up together with almost equal swiftness.

It was a moment of awful suspense for the old mulatto and Henrietta, both of whom, standing on a higher level, could see the progress of this appalling chase. Both of them gasping, with outstretched arms and open mouths, without any means of helping Sara, uttered broken exclamations at each alternative of fear or hope; but presently the fear preponderated, for, spite of the swimmer's efforts, the shark gained on her. The Negro was still twenty yards from the monster, which was but a few strokes from Sara. A terrible twist of his tail brought him still closer. The girl, who was pale as death, could hear the wash of the water ten feet behind her. She threw a last glance at the shore which she had now no time to reach. Then she realised how it was useless to struggle any longer for her doomed life; she raised her eyes to heaven, clasped her hands above the water, imploring God who alone could succour her. And now the shark turned over to seize his prey; and, instead of his green back, his silver belly was seen on the surface of the sea. Henrietta covered her face with her hands so as to shut out the sight of what was about to happen; but, at this supreme moment, a double report from a gun sounded to the governess's right hand; two bullets followed one another with the rapidity of lightning, making the water spout up, and a calm, sonorous voice uttered, in the satisfied tone of a marksman well-pleased with himself, the words:—

"Well hit."

Henrietta turned and saw, dominating the whole of the dreadful scene, a young man who, grasping his still smoking rifle in one hand and holding on with the other to a cinnamon tree, while his feet were supported by the edge of a rock, watched the convulsions of the shark. The latter, wounded in two places, had at once turned over, as if to seek the invisible enemy who had just struck him. Then, seeing the Negro, who was not more than three or four strokes from him, he abandoned Sara in order to pursue him; but, on his approach, the man

dived and disappeared under the water. The shark dived in turn; presently the water was agitated by the lashings of the monster's tail, its surface was tinged with blood, and it became evident that a struggle was taking place beneath the waves.

During this time Henrietta had come down, or rather, let herself slide down from her rock, and had reached the shore so as to hold out her hand to Sara, who, utterly exhausted and still unable to believe she had really and truly escaped such a fearful peril, no sooner touched the land than she fell on her knees. As for Henrietta, scarcely did she see her pupil safe than, her strength failing her in her turn, she collapsed in an almost swooning condition.

When the two women regained their senses, the first thing they noticed was Laïza standing, covered with blood from wounds in his arm and thigh, while the carcass of the shark was floating on the surface of the sea.

Then both women at the same instant and with a spontaneous movement directed their eyes towards the rock on which had appeared the delivering angel. The rock was deserted: the delivering angel had disappeared, though not so quickly but that both had had time to recognize him as the young stranger of Port-Louis.

Then Sara turned towards the Negro who had just given her so signal a proof of his devotion. But, after an instant of mute contemplation, the latter had betaken himself again into the wood, and Sara looked around her in vain; like the stranger, the Negro had vanished.

## CHAPTER XI

### A SALE OF STOCK

AT the same moment two men rushed up who had seen, from a point higher up the river, a part of the scene that had just taken place; they were M. de Malmédie and Henri.

The girl then remembered that she was but half-dressed, and, blushing at the idea of being seen in that state, she called the



old mulatto woman, put on a dressing-gown, and, leaning on Henrietta's arm, who was still palpitating with terror, advanced towards her uncle and cousin.

The latter, following the trail of the stag, had reached the bank of the river just as the double report of Georges' gun made itself heard. Their first impression was that one of their companions had fired at the animal; so they had looked in the direction whence the sound had come, and had seen, as we have said, from a distance and indistinctly, part of the incident which has been related. Behind the Malmédies came the rest of the shooting party.

Sara and Henrietta soon found themselves the centre of a group of men who questioned them on what had happened, but Henrietta was still too agitated and upset to give any coherent answer, and it was Sara who told the whole story.

There is a vast difference between being an eye-witness of a scene so terrible as the one we have tried to describe, following all its details with looks of horror, and merely hearing the relation of it, whether from the lips of her who had nearly been the victim, or on the actual spot where it has occurred. Still, as the smoke from the reports of the gun had hardly cleared away, and as the carcase of the monster was still afloat there, quivering in convulsions of pain, Sara's story produced a great effect. Each man was gallant enough to regret that he had not happened to be there in the place of the unknown stranger or the Negro. Each man was confident that he would certainly have aimed as correctly as the one, or swum as vigorously as the other. But to all these declarations of skill and protests of devotion, a silent voice replied inwardly in Sara's heart:—"None but those two could have done what they did."

At this moment the noise of the hounds showed that the stag was brought to bay. Every one knows what a delight it is for keen sportsmen to be present at the death-halloo of an animal which they have hunted the whole morning. Sara was saved and had nothing to fear. It was useless, therefore, to waste in condolences over an accident which, after all, had had no serious result, the time that might be spent more profitably elsewhere. Two or three of the sportsmen who were furthest from the girl made themselves scarce,

going off in the direction the noise came from, and four or five others soon followed their example. Henri remarked that it would be bad manners not to go with his invited guests, to whom he ought to do the honours of his estate under all circumstances; so at the end of ten minutes the only person remaining with Sara and Henrietta was M. de Malmédie.

The three returned to the dwelling-house, where an excellent dinner awaited the sportsmen, who were not long in arriving, with Henri at their head. He courteously brought his cousin one of the stag's hoofs, which he had himself cut off, to offer it to her as a trophy. Sara thanked him for this delicate attention, and Henri, on his side, congratulated her on having regained her beautiful colour so completely that one would have said, to look at her, that nothing at all out of the way had happened; and Henri's remark was echoed in chorus by the rest of the company. The meal was of the gayest. Henrietta had asked to be excused from it; the poor woman had received such a shock that she felt a feverish attack coming on. As for Sara, she was, as Henri had said, to all outward appearance at least, perfectly calm, and did the honours of the dinner with her customary grace. At dessert several toasts were drunk, among which, it is but right to say, some had reference to the event of the morning; but in these toasts no mention was made of the unknown Negro or the strange hunter. The whole honour of the miracle was credited to the grace of Providence wishing to preserve to M. de Malmédie and Henri a niece and a fiancée so tenderly beloved.

But if during the toasts no word was breathed of Laïza or Georges, whose names, in fact, were known to nobody, each individual, to make up for this omission, spoke at great length of his own prowess, and Sara with charming irony distributed to each the portion of the praise that was due to him for his skill and courage.

As they were rising from table, the Overseer entered, coming to tell M. de Malmédie that a slave who had attempted to escape had been caught and had just been brought back to the slaves' quarters. As this was a matter that happened almost every day M. de Malmédie contented himself with the answer:—

"All right; let him have the usual punishment."

"What is the matter, Uncle?" asked Sara.

"Nothing, my child," said M. de Malmédie.

And the conversation which had been interrupted, was resumed. Ten minutes later it was announced that the horses were ready. As Lord Murray's dinner and ball were on the next day, everybody was anxious to have the whole day to prepare for this solemnity; so it had been arranged that they should return to Port-Louis immediately after dinner.

Sara went into Henrietta's bedroom; the poor governess, without being seriously ill, was still so agitated that Sara insisted on her remaining at the *Rivière Noire*; besides, Sara would be the gainer by Henrietta's prolonged stay, for, instead of returning in the palanquin, she would go on horseback.

As the cavalcade was starting, Sara observed three or four Negroes busy cutting up the shark; the mulatto woman had told them where they would find its carcase, and they had gone to fish it out, so as to make it into oil.

On approaching the *Trois-Mamelles* the sportsmen saw from a distance the Negroes all assembled. When they reached the spot, they realised that the crowd was caused by the expectation of the punishment of a slave, the custom being, on such occasions, to collect the Negroes on the estate and compel them to witness the correction of any of their companions who had been guilty of misconduct.

The culprit was a youth of seventeen, who stood waiting, bound and gagged, near the ladder on which he would be fastened at the hour fixed for his punishment. This, at the urgent entreaty of another Negro, had been delayed until the cavalcade of riders should pass by, the slave who had importuned this favour having said that he had an important communication to make to M. de Malmédie.

At the moment, indeed, when M. de Malmédie arrived opposite the youth, a Negro who was sitting beside him occupied in stanching a wound which he had received in the head, got up and came close to the road; but the Overseer barred his further advance.

"What is the matter?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"Sir, said the Overseer, "it is the negro Nazim, who is about to receive the hundred and fifty lashes to which he has been sentenced."

"And why has he been sentenced to a hundred and fifty lashes?" asked Sara.

"For running away," answered the Overseer.

"Oh! said Henri," that is the man whose escape you came to tell us of."

"Yes, the same."

"And how did you recapture him?"

"Oh! quite easily. I just waited until he was too far from the shore either to row or to swim back to it; then I got into a long-boat with eight rowers and started in pursuit; on rounding the cape at the south-west we saw him at about two miles out to sea. As he had but two arms and a miserable canoe, while we had sixteen and a good pirogue, we very soon came up with him. Then he plunged in and swam, to try and reach the island, diving like a porpoise; but, to cut the matter short, he was the first to tire, and, finding the business troublesome, I took an oar from the hands of one of the rowers, and, when he came up again to the surface, struck him such a well-aimed blow on the head that I thought, the next time, that he had gone under for good and all. However, we saw him come up again after a moment, but he was unconscious, and did not recover his senses until we reached the Brabant hill, and here we are."

"But," said Sara eagerly, "perhaps the poor man is badly hurt."

"Oh! good gracious! no, Mademoiselle," replied the Overseer, "a mere scratch. These wretched Negroes are as soft as anything."

"And why have you been so long in administering the punishment he has so richly deserved?" said M. de Malmédie. "After the orders I gave, it should have been already done."

"And so it would have, sir," replied the Overseer, "if his brother, who is one of our best workers, had not assured me that he had something of importance to tell you, before the orders were carried out. As you were to pass the cantonment, and as it only involved a quarter of an hour's delay, I took upon myself to suspend your orders."

"And you have done quite right, Overseer," said Sara. "And where is he?"

"Who?"



"The brother of this wretched man?"

"Yes, where is he?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"Here," said Laïza coming forward.

Sara uttered a cry of surprise; she had just recognised, in the brother of the condemned slave, the man who had so nobly devoted himself to saving her life that morning. To her astonishment, however, the Negro had not once glanced in her direction, and seemed not to recognise her; instead of imploring her interference, as he certainly had the right to do, he continued to advance towards M. de Malmédie. It was not possible, however, to be mistaken: the gashes left by the shark's teeth on his arms and thigh were still open and bleeding.

"What do you want?" said M. de Malmédie.

"To ask a favour of you," answered Laïza in a low tone, so that his brother, who was twenty yards off, guarded by some other Negroes, should not hear.

"What is it?"

"Nazim is weak, Nazim is young, Nazim is wounded in the head and has lost a great deal of blood; Nazim is perhaps not strong enough to endure the punishment he deserves; he may die under the lash, and then you will have lost a Negro who, upon the whole, is worth a good two hundred dollars. . ."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want you to propose an exchange?"

"Of what sort?"

"That the hundred and fifty lashes which he has earned should be given to me instead. I am strong, and can bear them; and the punishment will not prevent my doing my work to-morrow as usual, while he, I repeat, is but a child, and it would kill him."

"It cannot be done," answered M. de Malmédie, while Sara, keeping her eyes fixed on the Negro, looked at him with the most profound astonishment.

"And why not?"

"Because it would be an injustice."

"You are wrong, for it is I who am really to blame."

"You!"

"Yes, I," said Laïza; "it is I who stirred Nazim up to run away, I who hollowed out the canoe which he used, and shaved his head with a piece of bottle glass, and gave him cocoa-oil to rub his skin with. So you see that it is I who should be punished, and not Nazim."

"You are wrong," answered Henri, taking part in the discussion. "You ought both to be punished; he for running away, you for having helped him to do so."

"Then give me three hundred lashes, and the matter will be settled."

"Overseer," said M. de Malmédie, "give each of these rogues a hundred and fifty lashes, and let that end it."

"One moment, Uncle," said Sara; "I ask for these two men to be let off."

"And why?" asked M. de Malmédie in astonishment.

"Because this is the man who threw himself in the water so bravely this morning to save me."

"She recognises me!" cried Laïza.

"Because, instead of the punishment he deserves, we must give him a recompense," cried Sara.

"Then," said Laïza, "if you think I have earned a recompense, grant me that Nazim shall be let off."

"Confound it!" said M. de Malmédie, "how you stick to it! Was it you who saved my niece?"

"It was not I," answered the Negro; "but for the young hunter, she would have been lost."

"But he did what he could to save me, Uncle, and he fought with the shark," cried the girl. "Why, look at his wounds, which are still bleeding."

"I fought with the shark, but in my own defence," replied Laïza. "The shark attacked me, and I had to kill it in order to save myself."

"Well, Uncle, you will not refuse to let them off for my sake?" Sara persisted.

"Yes, I shall certainly refuse," answered M. de Malmédie; "for if once an exemption were to be made on such an occasion, these blackamoors would all be running away, hoping that there would be some pretty mouth like yours to intercede for them."

"But, Uncle. . ."

"Ask these gentlemen if the thing is possible," said M. de Malmédie in a confident tone, turning to the young men who accompanied his son.

"It is a fact," they answered, "that such an exemption would be a ruinous precedent."

"You see, Sara."

"But a man who has risked his life for me," said Sara, "ought not to be punished

on the very same day ; for if you owe him a punishment, I owe him a reward."

"Well, we will each pay our debt ; when I have had him punished, you shall reward him."

"But, Uncle, now does the fault which these unhappy men have committed affect you, after all ? What harm have they done you, having failed to carry out their design ?"

"What harm has it done ? Why, it takes off part of their value. A Negro who has tried to run away loses a heavy percentage of his price. Here are two fellows who yesterday were worth, one five hundred, the other three hundred dollars—eight hundred dollars in all. Well, if I were to ask six hundred to-day, I should not get them."

"For my part, I wouldn't give six hundred for them now," said one of the sportsmen.

"Well, sir, I will be more liberal than you," said a voice, the tones of which made Sara start, "I will give a thousand."

The girl turned and recognised the stranger of Port-Louis, the Saving Angel of the rock, who was standing, dressed in an elegant shooting suit and leaning on his double-barrelled gun. He had heard all that had passed.

"Oh ! it is you, sir," said M. de Malmédie, while Henri's face flushed from a cause that he could not explain to himself, "accept, in the first place, my best thanks, for my niece has told me that she owes her life to you ; and, had I known where to find you, I should have hastened to see you, not to try to acquit myself of my obligation to you, which would be impossible, but to express my gratitude."

The stranger bowed without replying, and with an air of haughty modesty that did not escape Sara. Accordingly she hastened to add :—

"My Uncle is right, sir ; such a service cannot be repaid. But be assured that, as long as I live, I shall remember that I owe you my life."

"A couple of charges of powder and two lead bullets do not deserve such thanks, Mademoiselle. So I shall consider myself fortunate if M. de Malmédie's gratitude will go so far as to let me have, at the price I have offered him, these two Negroes, whom I need."

"Henri," said M. de Malmédie *sotto voce*, "were we not told yesterday that there was a slave-ship in sight ?"

"Yes father !" answered Henri.

"Good," continued M. de Malmédie, speaking this time to himself, "good, we shall be able to replace them."

"I await your answer, sir," said the stranger.

"Why, sir, with the greatest pleasure. The Negroes are yours, you can take them ; but, if I were in your place and could spare them from work for three or four days, I should have them punished this very day in the way they deserve."

"That is my affair," said the stranger, smiling. "The thousand dollars shall be sent you this evening."

"Excuse me, sir," said Henri, "you are mistaken : my father's intention is not to sell you these two men, but to give them to you. The life of two wretched Negroes cannot be put in comparison with a life so precious as that of my fair cousin. Let us, at least, offer you what we have, and what you appear to desire."

"But, sir," said the stranger, raising his head haughtily, while M. de Malmédie gave his son a most meaning look, "that was not our agreement."

"Well, then," said Sara, "allow me to make an alteration in it, and for the sake of her whose life you have saved, take these two Negroes whom we offer you."

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," said the stranger ; "it would be absurd of me to insist further. So I accept ; and it is I who now regard myself as in your debt."

And the stranger bowed and stepped back, as a sign that he did not wish to detain the company from their journey any longer.

The men exchanged bows ; but Sara and Georges exchanged looks.

The cavalcade resumed its journey, and Georges followed it with his eye for some time with that contraction of the brows which was habitual to him when a bitter thought pre-occupied him. Then, turning to the Negroes and approaching Nazim, he said to the Overseer :—

"Unbind that man ; for he and his brother are now my property."

The Overseer, who had heard the conversation between the stranger and M. de Malmédie, made no difficulty. Nazim accordingly was unbound and handed over with Laïza to his new master.

"Now, my friends," said the stranger turning to the Negroes and drawing from his pocket a purse filled with gold, "as I have received a present from your master, it is right that I, in my turn, should make



you a small present. Take this purse and divide its contents amongst you."

And he handed the purse to the Negro who was nearest to him, then, turning to the two slaves, who, standing behind him, were awaiting his orders, he said to them:—

"As for you two, do what you like now, go where you will, you are free."

Laïza and Nazim both uttered a cry of joy mingled with doubt, for they could not believe this act of generosity on the part of a man to whom they had rendered no service. But Georges repeated his words, upon which Laïza and Nazim fell on their knees, and kissed the hand of the man who had set them free, with an outburst of gratitude impossible to describe.

As for Georges, he replaced on his head his large straw hat, which up to now he had been holding in his hand, threw his gun over his shoulder, and, as it was beginning to grow late, resumed his road to Moka.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BALL

THE dinner and ball the announcement of which had caused such excitement in Port-Louis were to take place, as we have said, on the next day at Government House.

No one who has not lived in the Colonies, and especially in the Isle of France, has any idea of the luxury prevalent below the twentieth degree of South latitude. In addition to the marvels from Paris which cross the sea for the adornment of the graceful Creoles of Mauritius, they can make choice, at first hand, from among the diamonds of Visapore, the pearls of Ophir, the cashmeres of Siam, and the beautiful muslins of Calcutta. Not a vessel from the land of the "Thousand and One Nights" stops at the Isle of France without leaving behind a portion of the treasures she is carrying to Europe, and the dazzling effect presented by an assembly in the Isle of France causes astonishment even to one who is accustomed to the elegance of Paris or the profusion of England.

Accordingly the drawing-room in Gov-

ernment House, which in the space of three days had been entirely refurnished by Lord Murray in the most fashionable and comfortable style, presented, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, all the appearance of an apartment in the Rue du Mont-Blanc or Belgrave Square. The whole aristocracy of the Colony, male and female, were there assembled; the men in the simple dress imposed by modern fashion; the women sparkling with diamonds, loaded with pearls, attired all ready for the ball, with nothing to distinguish them from our European women but that languid and charming morbidezza of complexion possessed by none but Creole women. As each fresh arrival was announced, the person who entered was greeted with a general smile, for, at Port-Louis, everybody knows everybody else, and the only curiosity evinced at the entrance of a lady into the salon is to discover what new gown she has bought, where that gown comes from, of what material it is made, and how it is trimmed. It was especially in regard to the English women that the curiosity of the Creoles was aroused; for, in that perpetual strife of female vanity of which Port-Louis is the scene, the great question with the native ladies is how to outdo their foreign sisters in magnificence. The murmurs and whisperings which were heard at each fresh arrival were therefore louder and more prolonged when the lackey made the official announcement of some British name, the harsh sound of which contrasted as strongly with the soft-sounding native names as the fair pale daughter of the North differed from the dark maidens of the tropics. As each fresh guest entered, Lord Murray, with the politeness that characterises Englishmen in high society, advanced to meet them. If it was a lady, he offered his arm to lead her to her seat, paying her some compliment on the way; if it was a man, he shook hands with him and said a gracious word in his ear, so that everybody acknowledged the new Governor to be a charming man.

Presently the Malmédies were announced. Their arrival was expected with as much impatience as curiosity, not only because M. de Malmédie was one of the richest and most important men of the Island, but even more because Sara was one of the wealthiest and most elegant of its heiresses. Every one's eyes accordingly followed Lord Murray as he went

to meet her, for the question of how she would be dressed was the one that chiefly filled the minds of all the prettiest women among the guests.

Contrary to the custom of Creole women and to all expectation, Sara was dressed exceedingly simply, in a charming gown of Indian muslin, transparent and light as the gauze which Juvenal terms "woven air," without embroidery, without a single pearl or diamond; its sole adornment was a spray of pink hawthorn. A garland of the same leaves surrounded her head, while a bunch of the flowers was pinned at her waist; not so much as a bracelet set off the lustrous tint of her skin. Only her fine, dark, and silky hair fell in long ringlets over her shoulders, and in her hand she held the fan, that marvel of Chinese workmanship, which she had bought from Miko-Miko.

As we have said, every one knew every one else in the Isle of France; so that, after the arrival of the Malmédies, it was felt that there was no one else to come, since all those who, by their rank and wealth, were in the habit of meeting in society, were assembled. The company therefore naturally ceased to turn their eyes to the door, through which no one else was expected to enter, and, after waiting for ten minutes, began to ask each other what other guest Lord Murray could be expecting, when the door opened once more, and the servant in a loud voice announced "Monsieur Georges Munier."

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the middle of the company whom we have just brought together under the reader's eyes, it would certainly not have caused the effect produced by this simple announcement. On hearing the name, every one turned towards the door, wondering who it could be that was coming in; for, although the name was well known in the Isle of France, the person who bore it had been so long absent that people had almost forgotten his existence.

Georges entered.

The young mulatto was dressed with simplicity, but with extremely good taste. His well-fitting black coat, from the button-hole of which were suspended at the end of a gold chain the two little crosses with which he had been decorated, showed off all the elegance of his figure. His tight-fitting trousers revealed the

graceful, lithe shape of limb peculiar to men of colour, and, contrary to the custom of these latter, he wore no jewellery except a thin gold chain like the one in his button-hole, the only visible end of which disappeared into the pocket of his white piqué waistcoat. In addition, a black cravat tied with that studied negligence only acquired by fashionable habits, and over which a round shirt-collar was turned down, framed his handsome face, the fine morbidezza of which was set off by his dark moustache and hair.

Lord Murray advanced further to meet Georges than he had done in the case of any one else, and, after shaking hands with him, introduced him to three or four ladies and five or six English officers who were in the room as a travelling companion, on whose society he had congratulated himself during the whole of the voyage. Then, turning to the rest of the company he said:—

"Gentlemen, I present to you M. Georges Munier. M. Munier is your fellow-countryman, and the return of a man so distinguished as he is, ought almost to be the occasion of a national festivity."

Georges bowed in token of acknowledgment, but, whatever respect might be due to the Governor, especially in his own house, scarcely a single voice found strength to stammer a few words in answer to the introduction just made by Lord Murray.

Lord Murray either did not notice this, or appeared not to, and, on the servant announcing that dinner was served, the Governor gave his arm to Sara, and a move was made to the dining-room.

After what we know of Georges' character it will be easily guessed that it was not unintentionally that he had made the company wait for him, now that he was on the point of entering upon his struggle with that prejudice which he had determined to combat; he had wanted, at the first onset, to see his enemy face to face, and what he wished for had happened; the announcement of his name and his entrance had produced all the effect he could have expected.

But the person most stirred in the whole august assembly was undoubtedly Sara. Knowing that the young hunter of the *Rivière Noire* had arrived at Port-Louis with Lord Murray, she had expected beforehand to see him, and



possibly it was with a view to this fresh arrival from Europe that she had dressed herself with the elegant simplicity so much appreciated among ourselves, and which, it must be confessed, is so often replaced in the Colonies by an overdone smartness. So, on entering the salon, she had looked everywhere for the young stranger. One glance had sufficed to tell her that he was not there, but she concluded that he would arrive presently, and that when he was announced, as he no doubt would be, she would then learn for a certainty both his name and who he was.

What Sara had foreseen had happened. Scarcely had she taken her place in the circle of ladies, and the Messieurs Malmédie joined the group of men, than M. Georges Munier was announced.

At this name so well-known in the Island, but not usually heard mentioned in such circumstances, Sara started violently and then recovered herself, but yet was overcome with anxiety. She saw the young stranger of Port-Louis appear, with his calm face, his haughty look, his lip curling with contempt, and on the third appearance he seemed, let us hasten to add, even more handsome and romantic in her eyes than on the two previous occasions. Then she followed, not only with her eyes but with her heart, the introduction of Georges into society made by Lord Murray, and her heart was wounded when the repulsion inspired by the young mulatto's birth expressed itself by silence on the part of the guests, and it was with eyes almost blinded by tears that she responded to the swift and penetrating glance bestowed upon her by Georges.

Then Lord Murray gave her his arm and she saw nothing further, for she felt herself turning red and pale almost simultaneously beneath Georges' glance, and, feeling convinced that all eyes were directed towards herself, had immediately hastened to escape from the general curiosity. But on this point Sara was mistaken; nobody had given her a thought, for, with the exception of M. Malmédie and his son, they were all in ignorance of the two preceding incidents which had brought the young man and the girl in contact with each other, and nobody dreamed that there could be anything in common between Mademoiselle Sara de Malmédie and M. Georges Munier.

When once seated at table, Sara ventured to look round the room. She was placed on the right of the Governor, who had on his left the wife of the Military Commandant of the Island; opposite to her was the Commandant himself, seated between two ladies belonging to the most important families in the Island. Next, to the right and left of these two ladies, came M. de Malmédie and his son, and so on; while Georges, either by accident or by the graceful forethought of Lord Murray, was placed between two English ladies.

Sara breathed more freely: she knew that the prejudice that pursued Georges did not affect the minds of strangers, and that any one coming from a European country must have lived a very long time in the Colonies before sharing in it; she saw Georges therefore carrying out in the most easy fashion his rôle of an agreeable guest between the alternate smiles of Lord Murray's compatriots, who were delighted to have as their neighbour a man who spoke their language as well as if he had been himself an Englishman by birth.

While thus directing her glance towards the centre of the table, Sara noticed that Henri's eyes were fixed upon her. She understood perfectly what was passing in her fiancé's mind, and, with a movement which her will could not control, lowered her own eyes and blushed.

Lord Murray was, in the fullest meaning of the term, a great nobleman, admirably skilled in playing the part of host—a part so difficult to learn, unless it is fulfilled instinctively, and unless a man is, so to speak, born to it. Accordingly, when the constraint and uneasiness which usually prevail during the first courses of a formal banquet were dispelled, he began to address remarks to his guests, speaking to each on the subject calculated to elicit the best replies, reminding the English officers of some noted engagement, and the merchants of some brilliant piece of speculation, in the midst of all this making an observation from time to time to Georges, which showed that with him he could converse on all topics, and that he was addressing a man of universal information, and not a specialist on military affairs or on questions of commerce.

In this way the dinner progressed. Georges with his quick intelligence, but

with perfect modesty, had answered every observation and every question from the Governor in a way that proved to the officers that he, like themselves, had seen service, and to the merchants that he was acquainted with those great commercial concerns which make the whole world one single family, united by the bond of common interests. Moreover, interspersed with this fragmentary conversation, there had sprung to his lips the names of all those who in France or England or Spain occupied a high position in the world of politics, or of society, or of art, each accompanied by one of those remarks which show, in a single flash, that the man who is speaking speaks with a full knowledge of the character, or the genius, or the position of the men whom he has just mentioned.

Although these tit-bits of conversation, if one may so express it, had passed over the heads of the majority of the guests, there were among their number men who were capable of appreciating the superiority with which Georges had touched upon all these topics, so that, although the feeling of repulsion which they had shown towards the young mulatto still remained, their astonishment had increased, and, together with the astonishment, envy had entered the hearts of some of them. Henri especially, taken up with the idea that Sara had bestowed more notice on Georges than, considering her position as his fiancé, and her dignity as a white woman, she had any business to do, Henri, I say, felt an uncontrollable bitterness rising in his heart. Then, at the mention of the name of Munier, recollections of his boyhood were awakened; he recalled the day when, wishing to snatch the flag from Georges' hands, the latter's brother Jacques had struck him that severe blow in the face with his fist. All these bygone misdeeds of the two brothers stirred menacingly in his breast; and the thought that Sara had on the previous day been rescued by this man, instead of effacing these accusing murmurs in respect to the past, only fanned his resentment against him the more. As for M. Malmédie, he had been occupied throughout the dinner in a discussion with his neighbour on a new method of refining sugar, which would have the result of increasing by thirty per cent. the value of the produce of his estate. Consequently, apart from his

first astonishment at finding in Georges the preserver of his niece, and at meeting Georges in Lord Murray's house, he had paid no further attention to him.

But, as we have said, this was not the case with Henri, who had not lost a word of the questions put by Lord Murray and the answers given by Georges. He had recognised the sound sense and cultivated thought in each of these answers; he had studied the firm glance which was the exponent of Georges' authoritative will, and realised that here was no longer, as on the day of his departure, a down-trodden boy whom he saw before him, but a powerful opponent who came to challenge him.

Had Georges, on his return to the Isle of France, relapsed humbly into the condition for which, according to the views of white men, Nature had intended him, and suffered himself to be eclipsed by the obscurity of his birth, Henri would in that case have passed over, or at any rate have cherished no malice against him for, the wrong inflicted upon him by Georges fourteen years ago. But the case was far otherwise.

He had come back proudly in broad daylight, as it were, and had, by a service rendered to his family, intermeddled in its life, and now came as his equal in rank and his superior in intelligence to sit at the same table with himself. This was more than Henri could bear, and Henri in his own mind deliberately declared war against him.

So, on leaving the table, and when they had just passed out into the garden, Henri went up to Sara, who, with several other ladies, was seated in an arbour parallel to the one beneath which the gentlemen were taking their coffee. Sara started, feeling an instinctive certainty that what Henri was about to say concerned Georges.

"Well, fair cousin," said the young man, leaning over the bamboo chair on which the girl was sitting, "what do you think of the dinner?"

"That question, I presume, does not relate to the menu?" answered Sara with a smile.

"No, dear cousin, though, with some of our fellow-guests, who do not live, like yourself, on dew and air and perfumes, that question would not be out of place. No, my question refers to the social aspect, if I may say so."



"Well, it was excellent, I thought. Lord Murray appeared to me to do the honours of his table admirably, and to have made himself, as far as I could see, as agreeable as possible to everybody."

"Yes, certainly; and therefore I am greatly astonished that he should have run the risk of compromising us all as he has done."

"In what way?" asked Sara, who understood perfectly what her cousin was driving at, and who, drawing upon a strength that lay, unknown to herself, at the bottom of her heart, looked her cousin straight in the eyes as she put this question to him.

"Why," answered Henri, somewhat embarrassed not only by her clear gaze, but also by the low murmur of his conscience, "in inviting M. Georges Munier to meet us at the same table."

"And I am no less astonished, Henri, that you should not have left to somebody else the task of making this observation to me, of all people."

"And why am I alone forbidden to make this remark, my dear cousin?"

"Because, but for M. Georges Munier, whose presence here you think so unbecoming, your father and you, that is if a cousin is worth bewailing and a niece deserving of mourning, would now be in mourning and tears."

"Yes, of course," answered Henri, reddening; "I acknowledge all the gratitude we owe to M. Georges for having saved a life so precious as your own, and you saw yesterday how, when he wanted to buy those two Negroes whom my father was going to have punished, I hastened to give them to him."

"And by the present of those two Negroes you think you have discharged your obligation to him? I thank you, cousin, for valuing the life of Sara de Malmédie at the sum of a thousand dollars."

"Good heavens! my dear Sara," said Henri, "how strangely you twist things to-day. Was I thinking for a moment of putting a price upon a life, for which I would sacrifice my own? No, I only intended to point out to you into what a false position, for instance, Lord Murray would put any lady who was invited to dance by M. Georges Munier."

"Then, in your opinion, my dear Henri, that lady should decline?"

"Undoubtedly she should."

"Without reflecting that by declining, she offers a man who has done her no harm, and who has even perhaps rendered her some small service, an insult for which he would necessarily demand satisfaction from her father, her brother, or her husband?"

"I presume that, in such a case, M. Georges would examine himself and have the justice to suppose that a white man would not condescend to measure swords with a Mulatto."

"Pardon me, cousin, for venturing to express an opinion in such a matter," replied Sara; "but either, after the little I have seen of him I have misjudged M. Georges, or I do not think that, if it was a question of avenging his honour, a man who wears two crosses on his breast, as he does, would be stopped by that inward feeling of humility with which you have credited him—quite gratuitously, I think."

"At any rate I hope, my dear Sara," replied Henri, his face red with anger, "that the fear of exposing my father or myself to the wrath of M. Georges will not make you so imprudent as to dance with him, should he have the effrontery to ask you to do so."

"I shall dance with no one, sir," replied Sara, coldly, rising and taking the arm of the English lady who had sat next Georges at table, and who was a friend of hers.

Henri remained for a moment quite dumbfounded by this unexpected firmness, then he joined a group of young Creoles, among whom he doubtless found more sympathy with his aristocratic notions than his cousin had evinced.

During this time Georges, in the centre of another group, was chatting with some English officers and merchants, who did not share, or only to a very slight extent, the prejudice of his compatriots.

An hour passed thus during which all the preparations for the ball were completed, and then the doors were thrown open, giving admission to the rooms from which the furniture had been removed, and which were now ablaze with lights. At the same instant the orchestra struck up, as a signal for the quadrille.

Sara had had a severe internal struggle in condemning herself to merely watch the dancing, for, as we have said, she was passionately fond of balls. But all the bitterness of the sacrifice she was making

recoiled upon the man who had demanded it of her; while on the contrary, a more deep and tender feeling than any she had yet experienced began to stir in her heart in favour of the man for whose sake she had made the sacrifice, for it is one of the sublime characteristics of women, whom Nature and Society have combined to make so weak and so winning, to display a strong interest in all who are oppressed, as well as a lofty admiration for such as will not let themselves be oppressed.

So, when Henri, hoping that his cousin would be unable to resist the temptation of the opening strains, came, in spite of her expressed decision, to ask her to dance the first quadrille with him as usual, Sara merely answered:—

"You know I am not dancing to-night, cousin."

Henri bit his lips until the blood came, and, by an instinctive movement, sought with his eyes for Georges. The latter had taken up his position and was dancing with the Englishwoman whom he had taken in to dinner. With a feeling that was merely one of sympathy Sara's eyes had followed in the direction of her cousin's. Her heart was wrung with pain, for Georges was dancing with some one else, perhaps was not even thinking of the Sara who had just made a sacrifice for his sake, which but yesterday she would have deemed herself incapable of making for any one in the world. The minutes during which this quadrille lasted were perhaps the most unhappy that Sara had ever spent.

When the quadrille was over, Sara, in spite of herself, could not keep her eyes from following Georges. He escorted the Englishwoman to her place and then appeared to look about for some one. It was Lord Murray whom he sought. As soon as he discovered him, he went up and spoke a word or two to him, and then both advanced towards Sara.

Sara felt the blood rush to her heart.

"Mademoiselle," said Lord Murray, "here is a fellow-traveller of mine who is perhaps a too scrupulous observer of European customs, and therefore does not venture to ask you to dance before he has had the honour of being introduced to you. Allow me then to present to you M. Georges Munier, one of the most distinguished men of my acquaintance."

"As you say, my lord," replied Sara, in a voice which, by dint of self-control, she succeeded in rendering almost steady, "this fear on the part of M. Georges is somewhat exaggerated; for we are already old acquaintances. On the very day of his arrival M. Georges did me a kindness; while yesterday he did more than that, for he saved my life."

"What! the young hunter who had the good fortune to be on the spot and shoot that dreadful shark, while you were bathing, was he M. Georges?"

"The same, my lord," replied Sara, blushing at the mere thought of Georges having seen her in her swimming-dress; "and I felt so agitated and alarmed yesterday that I had hardly strength to offer M. Georges my thanks. But to-day I renew them all the more gratefully, since it is to his skill and coolness that I owe the pleasure of being present at your delightful entertainment, my lord."

"And we add our thanks to yours," put in Henri, who had joined the little group of which Sara formed the central figure; "for we too, yesterday, were so disturbed and upset by this accident that we scarcely had the honour of saying a word to M. Georges."

Georges, who had not uttered a word, but whose piercing eyes had penetrated to the depth of Sara's heart, bowed in token of acknowledgment, but without making any other reply to Henri.

"Then I hope," said Lord Murray, "that the request M. Georges wanted to make of you will be successful on its own merits, and I leave my protégé to speak for himself."

"Will Mademoiselle de Malmédie give me the honour of a dance?" said Georges, bowing once more.

"Oh! sir," said Sara, "I am truly sorry, and I hope you will forgive me. I have just refused my cousin, as I do not intend to dance to-night."

Georges smiled with the air of a man who grasps the whole situation, and drew himself up, giving Henri a glance of such utter contempt that Lord Murray perceived, from this glance and the way in which it was answered by Henri, that between these two men existed a deep and inveterate hatred. But he concealed this observation in the depths of his heart, and, as though he had noticed nothing, remarked to Sara:—

"No doubt the effects of your alarm



yesterday are re-acting upon your enjoyment to-day."

"Yes, my lord," answered Sara; "and I even feel so unwell that I will ask my cousin to let M. de Malmédie know that I should like to go away, and that I depend upon him for taking me home."

Henri and Lord Murray both made a movement in order to carry out the girl's wishes. Georges stooped quickly and said in a low tone:—

"You have a noble heart, Mademoiselle, and I thank you."

Sara started, and would have answered him, but Lord Murray had already returned, so she only exchanged looks, almost in spite of herself, with Georges.

"You are still resolved to leave us, Mademoiselle?" said the Governor.

"Yes, alas!" answered Sara. "I should be so, so delighted to stay, my lord, but—I really feel ill."

"In that case, I feel that it would be selfish to try to keep you; and, as M. de Malmédie's carriage is probably not within reach, I will give orders for the horses to be put to my own."

And Lord Murray went off at once.

"Sara," said Georges, "when I left Europe to come back here, my one desire was to meet with a heart like yours; but I did not expect to do so."

"Sir," murmured Sara, swayed in spite of herself by the deep tones of his voice, "I do not know what you mean."

"I mean that, since the day of my arrival, I have cherished a dream, and that, should that dream ever be realised, I shall be the happiest of men."

Then, without waiting for Sara's answer, Georges bowed with respect and, seeing M. de Malmédie and his son approaching, left Sara with her uncle and cousin.

Five minutes later, Lord Murray returned to tell Sara that the carriage was ready, and offered her his arm to cross the salon. As they reached the door, the girl gave a last look of regret at the scene where she had promised herself so much enjoyment, and disappeared. But her look had encountered one from Georges, which seemed as though it would pursue her all the rest of her days.

On coming back from taking Mlle. de Malmédie to the carriage, the Governor, passing through the ante-room, met Georges who, in his turn, was getting ready to leave the ball.

"You going also?" said Lord Murray.

"Yes, my lord; you know that for the present I am living at Moka, and that, consequently, I have nearly eight miles to go; Antrim fortunately can do that in about an hour."

"You have had no private quarrel, have you, with Henri de Malmédie?" asked the Governor with an expression of interest.

"No, my lord, not yet," replied Georges smiling; "but, in all probability, it will not be long delayed."

"Either I am much mistaken, my young friend," said the Governor, "or the causes of your enmity towards this family date from a long time back?"

"Yes, my lord, little bullyings between boys which produce first-class hatred between grown up men; pin-pricks that develop into sword-thrusts."

"And is there no way of settling all this?" asked the Governor.

"I hoped so at one time, my lord; I thought fourteen years of British rule might have killed the prejudice which I came back to combat. I was mistaken; and nothing remains but that the wrestler should rub his body with oil and step down into the arena."

"Will you not be encountering wind-mills rather than giants, my dear Don Quixote?"

"I leave you to judge," said Georges smiling. "Yesterday I saved Mlle. de Malmédie's life. Do you know how her cousin thanked me for it to-day?"

"No."

"By forbidding her to dance with me."

"Impossible!"

"It is as I have had the honour to tell you, my lord."

"And why did he do this?"

"Because I am a Mulatto."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"What do I intend?"

"Forgive my indiscretion; but you know what an interest I take in you, and besides, we are old friends."

"You ask what I intend to do?" said Georges with a smile.

"Yes; I am sure you have thought out some plan on your side."

"I have decided upon one this very evening."

"What is it? Come, I will tell you if I approve of it."

"It is this, that in three months I will be Mademoiselle de Malmédie's husband."

And, before Lord Murray had time to express either approval or disapproval, Georges took his leave and went out. His Moorish servant was waiting at the door with his two Arab horses.

Georges mounted Antrim and galloped off towards Moka. On entering his house, the young man inquired where his father was, but learned that he had gone out at seven o'clock that evening and had not yet returned.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SLAVER

NEXT morning Pierre Munier came into his son's room.

Since his arrival, Georges had gone over his father's fine estate several times, and, from his knowledge of industrial matters as carried on in Europe, had made several suggestions by way of improvement, which his father, as a practical man, had grasped immediately. The carrying out of these ideas, however, necessitated the employment of additional labour; while the abolition of public slave-dealing had so greatly increased the value of slaves, that there was no way of procuring in the Island, except at an enormous expense, the fifty or sixty Negroes whom the father and son wanted to add to the establishment. Accordingly, Pierre had heard with joy the evening before, in the absence of Georges, the news that there was a slave-ship in sight, and had gone down to the coast that very night, in accordance with the custom then adopted by the Colonists and the traders in "black ivory," to answer the signals made by the slave-ship by other signals which indicated an intention to trade with her. These had been duly exchanged, and Pierre Munier came to tell Georges the good news. It was accordingly arranged that the father and son should repair at nine in the evening to the *Pointe-des-Caves*, below the *Petit-Malabar*. Having made this arrangement, Pierre went out to inspect, according to his custom, the work on the estate, while Georges, also according to his custom, took his gun and made for the woods, in order to give himself up to his dreams.

What Georges had told Murray the previous evening was no empty boast, but, on the contrary, a resolve firmly determined. The whole life and training of the young Mulatto had, as we have seen, been directed towards the object of imparting to his will the force and persistency of genius. Having reached such a superiority in every department, as, aided by his wealth, would have assured to him in France or in England, in London or in Paris, a career of distinction, Georges, eager for combat, had desired to return to the Isle of France. It was there that the prejudice existed which his courage believed itself destined to combat, and his pride believed itself able to overcome. He returned then with the advantage of being unknown by sight, of being able to study his enemy while the latter was in ignorance of the war which Georges had declared against him in his inmost heart, ready as he was to spring upon him at the moment when he least expected it, and to enter upon a struggle in which either the man must perish, or the whole system he was vowed to combat. On setting foot upon the quay, and seeing once more on his return the same men that he had left at his departure, Georges had realised a fact of which he had often been doubtful when in Europe, namely, that everything remained in *statu quo* in the Isle of France, although fourteen years had elapsed, although the Island which had been French was now English, and instead of being called the Isle of France was now called Mauritius. Then, and from that moment, he had put himself on his guard, had prepared for the moral duel which he had come in search of, just as another prepares for a physical duel, if we may so express it; and had waited, sword in hand, till the first opportunity of striking a blow at his adversary should present itself.

But just as Cæsar Borgia, who had by his genius foreseen everything necessary for the conquest of Italy after the death of his father, except the fact that he would then be a dying man himself, Georges found himself engaged in a manner that he had been unable to foresee, and found himself struck at the very moment that he wished to strike. On the day of his arrival at Port-Louis, chance had thrown in his path a beautiful girl, whom he could not forget, do what he would.

Then Providence had brought him there



in the nick of time for saving her life—the life of the very girl of whom he had been dreaming vaguely ever since he had seen her, so that this dream had entered more deeply than ever into his life. Finally, chance had brought them together the previous evening, and there a single glance, at the same moment that he knew he loved, had told him that he was loved in return. Henceforth, the struggle presented a fresh interest for him, an interest in which his happiness was doubly bound up, since henceforth this strife was carried on, not merely for the satisfaction of his pride, but also for that of his love.

Only, as we have said, Georges, being wounded at the beginning of the combat, lost the advantage of his coolness; though it is true that in the exchange he gained the vehemence of his passion.

But, if the sight of the girl had made the impression we have described upon a man like Georges, satiated with life, and with passions no longer unsullied, the sight of the young man and the circumstances in which he had successively appeared before her were bound to produce a vastly deeper impression upon the budding life and virgin soul of Sara. Brought up, since the time when she lost her parents, in M. de Malmédie's house, destined from that time to double, by her dowry, the fortune of the heir to the estate, she had accustomed herself henceforth to look on Henri as her future husband, and had the more easily submitted to this prospect, since Henri was a handsome and worthy youth, ranking among the wealthiest and most fashionable Colonists, not only of Port-Louis, but throughout the whole Island. As for Henri's other young friends, who were her companions in the chase and her partners in the dance, she had known them all too long for it ever to have entered her head to make any preference among them; to her they were merely the friends of her childhood who would be associated in peaceful friendship with her for the rest of her life, and that was all.

Sara then was in this perfectly tranquil condition of mind when she had noticed Georges for the first time. In the life of all young girls, the appearance of a young man unknown, handsome, of gentlemanly bearing and graceful build, is an event, and still more so, as you may readily believe, in the Isle of France.

The young stranger's face, the tone of his voice, the words he had spoken, had all dwelt in Sara's memory, without her knowing why, like a tune which you have only heard once, but which, nevertheless, you repeat over and over again in your head. No doubt Sara would have forgotten this event after a few days' time, had she met this young man again in ordinary circumstances; possibly a closer examination, such as is bestowed upon a second meeting, instead of involving the man more deeply in her life, might even have obliterated him from it entirely. But things had turned out differently. God had so willed that Georges and Sara should meet again at a supreme crisis; the episode of the "*Rivière Noire*" had occurred. To the curiosity which accompanied his first appearance were joined the romance and the gratitude that surrounded the second. In an instant Georges had been transformed in the girl's eyes. The unknown stranger had become an angel of deliverance. All the agony of the death with which Sara had been threatened, Georges had spared her; all the pleasure, and promise of future happiness that life holds out at the age of sixteen, Georges had restored to her at the moment when she was about to lose them. Yet when having scarcely seen him, having scarcely addressed a word to him, she found herself face to face with him and was about to pour out all the gratitude of her heart, she was forbidden to grant this man what she would have granted to the first stranger who asked it, and moreover was ordered to offer him an insult which she would not have offered to the meanest of men. Then the gratitude driven back to her heart had changed to love; a look had told Georges everything; a word from Georges had told Sara everything. Sara had been unable to deny anything, so Georges had the right to believe everything. Then, after the impression made upon her, had come reflection. Sara had been unable to prevent herself from comparing the behaviour of Henri, her future husband, with that of this stranger, with whom she was scarcely acquainted. On the first day, Henri's sneers at the unknown stranger had hurt her feelings. His indifference, as he rushed off to the death-halloo of the stag when his fiancé had only just escaped a mortal peril, had wounded her heart; lastly, the masterful

tone in which Henri had spoken to her on the day of the ball had offended her pride. So during that long night which should have been a happy one, but which Henri had turned into a sad and lonely one, Sara had questioned her feelings for the first time, perhaps, and had realised for the first time that she did not love her cousin. From that, to knowing that she loved another, was but a step.

What usually takes place in such cases happened now. Sara, after directing her eyes upon herself, turned them next upon her surroundings; she weighed in the balance of interest her Uncle's conduct towards her; she remembered that she had a fortune of about a million and a half francs, that is to say, that she was nearly twice as rich as her cousin. She asked herself if her Uncle would have shown the same care and tenderness for her as a poor orphan which he had shown for her as a wealthy heiress, and she saw nothing more in M. de Malmédie's adoption of her than what it was in reality, namely, the calculating policy of a father who prepares a good marriage for his son. All this was no doubt rather severe, but so it is with wounded hearts; the wound drives gratitude away, and the grief which remains becomes a stern judge.

Georges had foreseen all this, and had counted upon it as an aid in pleading his cause and damaging that of his rival. So, after a good deal of reflection, he determined to attempt nothing further that day, though, in the depth of his heart, he felt very impatient to see Sara again. That is why he now had his gun on his shoulder, hoping to find, in his favourite amusement of shooting, a distraction which would help him to pass the day. But Georges had deceived himself; his love for Sara was already speaking in his heart more loudly than any other feelings. Accordingly, towards four o'clock, unable any longer to resist his desire—I will not say to see Sara once more, for not being able to visit her, it would only be by chance that he could meet her—but his wish to be somewhere near her, he had Antrim saddled; then, giving the rein to the fleet child of Arabia, in less than an hour he found himself in the capital of the Island.

Georges came to Port-Louis with but a single hope; but, as we have said, this hope was entirely at the mercy of chance,

and chance this time proved inflexible. Georges rode in vain through all the streets in the neighbourhood of M. de Malmédie's house; he rode in vain twice through the Jardin de la Compagnie, the usual promenade of the inhabitants of Port-Louis; he went in vain three times round the Champ de Mars, where preparations were being made for the forthcoming races—nowhere, even at a distance, did he see any woman whose appearance could have led him to think her to be Sara.

At seven, Georges gave up all hope, and, with a pain at his heart as though he had met with some misfortune, or undergone some dreadful hardship, he took once more the road of the *Grande-Rivière*, but slowly this time and holding his horse in; for now he was riding away from Sara, who doubtless had not guessed that Georges had ridden ten times up and down the *Rue de la Comédie* and the *Rue du Gouvernement*, that is to say, scarcely a hundred yards from where she was. He was passing then the cantonment of the free blacks, situated outside the town, still holding in Antrim, who could not at all understand this unaccustomed pace, when suddenly a man came out of one of the huts and threw himself at his horse's stirrup, grasping his knees and kissing his hand. It was Miko-Miko, the Chinese dealer, the man of the fan.

On the instant Georges perceived vaguely the use which he could make of this man, whose business permitted him to gain entrance into every house, and who, through his ignorance of the language, could inspire no distrust.

Georges dismounted and went into the shop of Miko-Miko, who at once made him inspect all his treasures.

There was no mistaking the feeling which the poor fellow had expressed for Georges, and which issued from the depths of his heart at each word he said. The explanation was quite simple; with the exception of two or three of his fellow-countrymen, who were dealers like himself, and, consequently, if not hostile to him, at least in rivalry with him, Miko-Miko had not yet found a single person at Port-Louis with whom he could converse in his own language. Accordingly he asked Georges in what way he could make a return for the happiness which he owed to him.

The request which Georges had to



make was a very simple one; nothing more than a plan of the interior of M. de Malmédie's house, so that, should circumstances require it, he might know how to reach Sara's apartments.

At the first words spoken by Georges, Miko-Miko understood the whole matter; we have said that the Chinese were the Jews, so to speak, of the Isle of France.

In order, however, to facilitate the negotiations between Miko-Miko and Sara, and possibly also with a further intention, Georges wrote upon one of his visiting-cards the prices of various objects which might tempt the girl's fancy, bidding Miko-Miko let nobody see this card but Sara herself.

Then he gave the dealer another doubloon, telling him to come to Moka next day at about three in the afternoon.

Miko-Miko promised to be at the appointed meeting-place, and undertook to carry in his head as exact a plan of the house as could be traced by a draughtsman.

After this, inasmuch as it was now eight o'clock, and at nine Georges had to meet his father, as we have said, at the *Pointe-aux-Caves*, he remounted his horse and continued his journey along the road of the *Petite-Rivière*, with a lighter heart than before. For those who are in love, a very little thing is needed to change the aspect of the horizon.

It was quite dark when Georges arrived at the meeting-place. His father, true to the habit of punctuality, which he had always observed when dealing with white men, had been there for ten minutes. At half-past nine the moon rose.

This was the moment for which Georges and his father were waiting. They at once directed their gaze between the *Ile Bourbon* and the *Ile de Sable*, and there they saw a light flash three times. This was the customary signal, given by a mirror reflecting the moon's rays, and well understood by the Colonists. On seeing it, Télémaque, who had accompanied his employers, lighted a fire on the shore which he extinguished five minutes later, and then they waited.

Half-an-hour had not elapsed when they saw faintly appearing on the sea a dark line, like a great fish swimming on the surface of the water; then this line grew larger and more distinct, assuming the appearance of a pirogue. Soon after, a large boat could be made out, and, by

the shimmering rays of the moon on the sea, the movement of oars striking the water could be discerned, though their sound was as yet inaudible. Eventually the boat entered the bay of the *Petite-Rivière*, and landed in the creek just opposite the small fort.

Georges and his father advanced down the beach. A man who had been seen sitting in the stern of the boat had already stepped ashore.

Behind him came some dozen sailors armed with guns and axes. They were the same men who had been rowing, with their guns slung over their shoulders. The man who had landed first gave them a signal, upon which they began to disembark the Negroes, of whom there were thirty lying in the bottom of the boat, while an equal number were to be brought in a second boat.

Then the two Mulattos and the man who had landed first came together and exchanged a few words, as the result of which Georges and his father were convinced of what they had already guessed, namely, that they were in the presence of the Captain of the Slaver himself.

He was a man of about two and thirty, tall in stature, and bearing all the signs of physical strength developed to a pitch that instinctively commands respect. He had dark frizzled hair, whiskers that met under the chin, and moustaches that joined the whiskers. His face and hands, tanned by the suns of the Tropics, had acquired very much the complexion of the Indians of Timor or Pegu. He was dressed in the jacket and trousers of blue cloth worn by sportsmen in the Isle of France, and, like them, had a broad straw hat and carried a gun over his shoulder. Only, unlike them, he wore in addition, suspended from his belt, a curved sword, shaped like an Arab scimitar, but larger, and with a hilt resembling that of the Scotch claymore. If the Captain of the Slaver had been the object of a close examination on the part of the two inhabitants of Moka, they too, in their turn, had had to undergo an examination no less searching. The trader in black flesh glanced from one to the other with equal curiosity, and the more closely he scrutinized them, the more did he appear unable to withdraw his eyes from them. Georges and his father failed apparently to notice the



THE MEETING





persistence of his gaze, or, at any rate, were not made uneasy by it, for they entered upon the negotiation for which they had come, examining one after another the Negroes who had been brought in the first boat, and who were nearly all natives of the West Coast of Africa, that is to say, of Senegambia and Guinea,—a circumstance which further increases their value, inasmuch as, not having, like the natives of Madagascar, the Mozambiques, or the Kaffirs, any hope of reaching their country again, they hardly ever make an attempt to escape. In spite of this excuse for raising the price, the Captain was very reasonable in his demands, and so, when the second boat-load arrived, the bargain for the first had been already concluded.

The Negroes in the second boat were as good in quality as those of the first. The Captain's stock was first-rate, and showed him to be a thorough connoisseur in his own line of business. This was a piece of real good luck for the Isle of France, to which he had come for the first time to ply his trade, having heretofore shipped slaves more especially for the Antilles.

When all the Negroes had been disembarked and the deal was concluded, Télémaque, himself a native of the Congo, came up to them and delivered a discourse in his mother-tongue, which was theirs also. The aim of this discourse was to boast to them of the mild lot in which their future life was cast, compared with the life led by their countrymen in the employment of the other planters of the Island, and to tell them that they had had the good fortune to come into the hands of MM. Pierre and Georges Munier, who were the kindest employers in the Island. Then the Negroes approached the two Mulattos, and, falling on their knees, promised, Télémaque acting as their mouthpiece, that they would prove worthy of the happiness which Providence had kept in store for them.

At the name of Pierre and Georges Munier, the Slave-Captain, who had followed the discourse of Télémaque with an attention which showed that he had closely studied the different dialects of Africa, had given a start, and looked even more attentively than before at the two men with whom he had just concluded with such promptness a transaction of nearly a hundred and fifty thousand francs. But Georges and his father

appeared to notice the other's reluctance to take his eyes off them no more than they had done before. At last the moment for settling up arrived. Georges asked the Captain how he would like to be paid, in gold or in notes, his father having brought gold in his saddle-bags and notes in his pocket-book, so as to be ready for every emergency. The Captain preferred gold. The amount was accordingly counted out on the spot and conveyed into the second boat; then the sailors embarked again. But, to the great astonishment of Georges and his father, the Captain did not go down with them to the boats, which, at an order given by him, pulled away from the shore.

The Captain followed them with his eyes for some little time; then, when they were out of sight and hearing, turned to the astonished Mulattos, and advancing towards them with a hand outstretched to each, exclaimed:—

“Good day, father! Good day, brother!” Then, seeing them hesitate, he added:—

“Why, do you not recognise your Jacques?” Both uttered a cry of surprise and held out their arms to him. Jacques threw himself into his father's arms, then passed from them to those of his brother; after which Télémaque, too, had his turn, although, be it said, it was not without trembling that he ventured to touch the hands of the Slave-Captain.

Thus, by a strange coincidence, did chance re-unite in the same family the man who had laboured all his life under the prejudice of colour, the man who was making his fortune by trading in it, and the man who was ready to risk his life in order to combat it.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SLAVE TRADE

THE man was really Jacques,—Jacques, whom his father had not set eyes on for fourteen, or his brother for twelve, years.

Jacques had left France on board one of those privateers, furnished with letters of marque from the Government, which at this period darted suddenly out of our



harbours, like eagles from their eyries, and attacked the English.

It was a rough school of training, and quite as valuable as that of the Imperial Navy, the ships of which, at this time, constantly blockaded in our ports, were as often lying idly at anchor as those of this other branch of marine, swift, light, and independent, were scouring the high seas. Every day, indeed, there was some fresh fighting; not that our privateers, bold as they were, picked quarrels with men-of-war, but that they were for ever attacking the great, big-bellied merchantmen, bursting with freight from India and China, homeward bound from Calcutta, or Buenos-Ayres, or Vera-Cruz. Now, either these vessels, harmless as they were to look at, were convoyed by some English frigate, by no means without beak and claws, or they had elected to arm and defend themselves on their own account. In the latter case, it was mere child's-play, a two hours' skirmish, and all was over; but, in the first case, the aspect of affairs was much more serious. Shots were exchanged, men were killed, and rigging damaged. Finally it came to boarding the vessel, and, after having been pounded from a distance, she was destroyed at close quarters.

Whilst this was taking place, the merchant-ships sheered off, and, if they did not meet, like the ass in the fable, with any other privateer to lay hands upon them, made some port in England, to the great satisfaction of the India Company who voted rewards of money to their defenders.

Such was the state of things at this period. Out of the thirty or thirty-one days which make up the month, fighting took place on twenty or twenty-five of them; then, by the way of respite from fighting, came days of tempest. Well, we repeat, in such a school a man learned quickly. At the first, as there was no conscription for the purpose of recruiting, and as this little amateur warfare did not discontinue until in the long run a good number of men had been used up, the crews were hardly ever up to their full strength. True, the sailors being all volunteers, quantity, in this case, was advantageously replaced by quality; so, during the fighting or the storms, nobody had any fixed duties, and each man could put his hand to everything. For the rest, there was absolute obedience to the Cap-

tain, when he was there, and to the First Officer, in the Captain's absence. Though this was the case throughout, it was particularly so on board the *Calypso*, which was the name of the ship which Jacques had chosen for serving his naval apprenticeship in; in six years she had had only two refractory seamen, one from Normandy, the other a Gascon, the one having disobeyed the authority of the Captain, the other that of his Lieutenant. The Captain had smashed in the first man's skull with an axe, while the Lieutenant had sent a pistol shot through the other's body; and both had died on the spot. Then, as nothing is so much in the way of working a ship as a dead body, the corpses had been chucked overboard, and there the matter ended. Only these two events, if they left no trace behind them except in the recollection of the crew, had none the less exercised a wholesome influence over their minds. None, after that, ever dreamed of picking a quarrel with Captain Bertrand or Lieutenant Rébard, for such were the names of these two worthies, who henceforth enjoyed the privilege of absolutely despotic authority on board the *Calypso*.

Jacques had always had a decided liking for the sea; when quite a boy he had been constantly on board the ships riding in Port-Louis, climbing into the shrouds and tops, swinging on the yards, sliding down the halliards; and, as it was especially on board vessels with which his father had business transactions that Jacques practised these gymnastic exercises, the Captains treated him with great kindness, satisfying his boyish curiosity, explaining everything to him and allowing him to climb from hold to top-gallants and back again. The result was, that, at the age of ten, Jacques was a most efficient cabin-boy, inasmuch as, in default of a vessel everything in his eyes represented a ship. He climbed trees, of which he made masts, and along bind-weed, which played the part of ropes, and at twelve years of age, knowing the name of every part of the ship, and every detail of the drill which takes place on its deck, he could have entered as a first-class candidate in the first vessel that appeared.

But, as we have already seen, his father had decided otherwise for him, and, instead of sending him to the *Ecole d'Angoulême*, to which his tastes summoned him, he had sent him to the *Collège Napoléon*. Here

was afforded a fresh confirmation of the proverb, "Man proposes, and God disposes." Jacques, after spending two years in drawing ships in his composition books and launching frigates on the big pond of the Luxembourg, availed himself of the first opportunity that offered of passing from theory to practice; and having, during a stay at Brest, gone to visit the brig *Calypso*, he told his brother, who had accompanied him, that he might go back to land by himself, but that, for his part, he had decided to become a sailor. Both submitted to this sudden decision, and Georges returned alone, as has been duly related, to the Collège Napoléon. As for Jacques, whose frank face and gallant bearing had at once won over Captain Bertrand, he was raised forthwith to the rank of able seaman, at which his comrades grumbled loudly.

Jacques let them grumble; he had in his own mind very clear ideas of justice and injustice; the men with whom he had just been put on an equality were ignorant of his worth, and so it was quite natural that they should be annoyed that a mere novice should have been treated with such favour. But, on the occurrence of the first storm, he cut away a top-gallant-sail which was blocked in the tackle, and which threatened to carry away the mast; while the first time they boarded a ship, he sprang upon the enemy's deck in front of the Captain, a proceeding which earned him such a tremendous blow from the latter's fist that he remained unconscious for three days, the rule on board the *Calypso* being that the Captain must always set foot on the enemy's deck before any of the crew. However, as this was one of the breaches of discipline for which one brave man readily forgives another, the Captain admitted the validity of the apology made by Jacques, and told him that in future, next after himself and the Lieutenant, he was at liberty, in similar circumstances, to take what order pleased him. At the second boarding Jacques was the third man on deck.

From that time the sailors ceased to grumble at Jacques, and even the old hands came up to him and were the first to shake hands. So matters went on until the year 1815. We say 1815, because Captain Bertrand, who was of a very sceptical turn of mind, had never chosen to take the fall of Napoleon seriously. Possibly too this feeling was influenced by the fact that,

having nothing to do, he had made two voyages to the Isle of Elba, and that, on the occasion of one of these voyages, he had had the honour of being received by the ex-master of the world. What had passed between the Emperor and the buccaneer at this interview no one ever discovered; all that was remarked was that Captain Bertrand returned on board whistling:—

"Ran tan plan tirelire

How we shall laugh, to be sure!" which, with Captain Bertrand, denoted an inward feeling of most intense satisfaction. After this, the Captain betook himself to Brest, where, without saying a word to any one, he began to put the *Calypso* in fighting trim, to lay in a stock of powder and shot, and to make up the few men who were wanting in order that his crew should be at its full strength. So that any one must have had a very imperfect acquaintance with Captain Bertrand who did not grasp the fact that he was cockering up behind the scenes some spectacle which would greatly astonish the audience.

As a matter of fact, six weeks after Captain Bertrand's last voyage to Porto-Ferrajo, Napoleon landed at the Gulf of Juan. Twenty-four days after his landing at the Gulf of Juan, Napoleon entered Paris; and seventy-two hours after Napoleon's entrance into Paris, Captain Bertrand left Brest with all sail set and the tricolour flying at the peak.

A week had not elapsed when Captain Bertrand entered the harbour again, hauling in tow a magnificent English three-master, laden with the finest spices from India; she had been so utterly astonished at seeing the tri-coloured flag, which was thought to have disappeared off the face of the earth, that it never entered her head to make even the slightest show of resistance.

This prize had made Captain Bertrand's mouth water. So, no sooner had he got rid of his capture at a suitable price and divided the proceeds among the crew, who had lain idle for nearly a year and were getting very weary of this inaction, than he went off in search of a second three-master. But, as everybody knows, you do not always find precisely what you are looking for; one fine morning, after a very dark night, the *Calypso* found herself cheek by jowl with a frigate. This frigate was none other than the *Leicester*, the same vessel which we have seen at Port-Louis, conveying the Governor and Georges.



The Leicester had ten guns and sixty men more than the Calypso possessed; nor had she any cargo of cinnamon, sugar, or coffee; but, instead of these, a magazine perfectly equipped, and an arsenal stuffed full with shot and grape. Scarcely had she discovered, moreover, what country the Calypso hailed from than, without giving her the slightest warning, she sent her a sample of her goods, in the shape of a fine thirty-six pounder, which buried itself in her hull.

Quite differently from her sister Galatea, who fled in order to be seen, the Calypso would have been very glad to fly, without being seen. She had nothing to gain from the Leicester, even should she come off victorious, which was in the last degree unlikely. Unfortunately, it was hardly probable that she would escape, since her Captain was this same Lord Murray, who had not yet, at this period, quitted the navy, and who, for all his elegant appearance, to which, later on, his diplomatic labours had given yet a fresh colour, was one of the most intrepid sea-dogs between the Straits of Magellan and Baffin's Bay. Accordingly Captain Bertrand trained his two largest guns astern and sheered off.

The Calypso was a veritable ship of prey, designed for speed, narrow and long in the lines. But the poor little Sea-swallow was engaged with the Ocean-eagle; consequently, in spite of her agility, it was soon evident that the frigate was wearing the schooner down.

This superiority in pace soon became all the more noticeable from the fact that, every five minutes or so, the Leicester despatched leaden messengers to summon the Calypso to stop. To which the Calypso, still in flight, replied with her stern-guns by messengers of the same character. All this time, Jacques was examining with the greatest attention the masting of the brig, and making some most sensible remarks to Lieutenant Rébard on the improvements that might be made in the rigging of vessels intended, like the Calypso, either to chase or to be chased. There was above all a radical change to be effected in the top-gallant-masts, and Jacques, with his eyes fixed on this weak spot in the ship, had just finished his demonstration, when not receiving any signs of approval from the Lieutenant, he turned his eyes from the sky to the deck, and realised the cause of

the silence of his interlocutor: Lieutenant Rébard had just been cut in two by a cannon-shot. The situation was becoming serious; it was plain that, before another half hour was over, the two ships would be alongside each other, and that the Calypso would be obliged, to use a technical term, to *fudge it out* with a crew a third again as strong as her own. Jacques was communicating, in an aside, this rather disconcerting reflection to the Captain of one of the two stern-guns, when the fellow, in stooping to aim, apparently took a false step and fell with his nose on the breech of the gun. Seeing that he was slower in getting up again than a man ought to have been in such circumstances, and in so responsible a position, Jacques took him by his coat-collar and restored him to the perpendicular. But this done, he perceived that the poor wretch had swallowed a grape-shot; only, instead of following the perpendicular, the grape-shot had taken a horizontal line. Hence had come the accident. The poor man had died, as they say, from being unable to digest cast-iron.

Jacques, who, at the moment, had nothing better to do, stooped in his turn towards the gun, rectified the sight by a degree or so, and cried:—

"Fire!"

At the same instant the gun thundered, and Jacques, anxious to see the result of his skill, jumped upon the nettings, in order to watch, as far as he could do so, the effect of the projectile which he had just hurled at the enemy.

The effect was instantaneous. The mizen-mast, shattered a little above the main-top, bowed like a tree bent by the wind, then fell with a terrible crash, littering the deck with sails and rigging, and crushing a portion of the starboard bulwarks. A loud shout of triumph resounded on board the Calypso. The frigate had stopped in mid-chase, dipping her broken wing in the sea, while the schooner, safe and sound, but for a few ropes cut away, continued her course, freed from the enemy's pursuit.

The Captain's first care, on seeing himself out of danger, was to appoint Jacques Lieutenant in place of Rébard; this rank had devolved upon him, long since, in case of a vacancy, in the minds of all his comrades. The announcement of his promotion was accordingly welcomed with

unanimous acclamations. In the evening a public service was held for the dead. The bodies had been thrown into the sea as they passed from life to death, only that of the second in command having been reserved, in order that the honours due to his rank might be paid him. These honours consisted in being sewn up in a hammock with a thirty-six pounder at each foot. The ceremonial was carried out exactly, and poor Rébard went to rejoin his companions, having preserved the very slender advantage over them of being plunged into the depths of the sea, instead of floating on its surface.

In the evening, Captain Bertrand took advantage of the darkness to alter his course, that is to say, thanks to a slant of wind, he was able to reverse his course, so that he entered Brest, while the *Leicester*, which had hastened to substitute a fresh mast for her broken one, pursued her in the direction of Cape Vert.

This made Captain Murray extremely angry, and he swore that, if ever the *Calypso* came within reach of the *Leicester* again, she should not get off so cheaply the second time as she had done on the first occasion.

As soon as ever his damages were repaired, Captain Bertrand returned to his old game, and, well seconded by Jacques, performed many remarkable exploits. Unfortunately, Waterloo supervened; after Waterloo, came the second abdication, and, after the second abdication, peace. This time there was no longer room for doubt. The Captain saw the prisoner of Europe pass by, on board the *Bellerophon*, and, as he was acquainted with St. Helena from having called there twice, he realised at once that there is no escaping from that island as there is from Elba.

Captain Bertrand's prospects were greatly compromised by that great cataclysm in which so many things were shattered. He was obliged, therefore, to create for himself a fresh trade. He had a fine schooner, a good sea boat, with a crew of a hundred and fifty men ready to follow his fortunes, good or bad; it occurred to him quite naturally to engage in the slave trade.

This was quite a nice business before the profession had been ruined by a heap of philosophical preachments, which nobody at that time had so much as thought of, and there were immense fortunes to be

made by those who were the first to embark in it. War, occasionally smothered in Europe, in Africa is perpetual; there is always some tribe that is thirsty, and, as the inhabitants of that fine country observed, once and for all, that the surest means of procuring prisoners was to have plenty of brandy, you needed only at this period to follow the coasts of Senegambia, Congo, Mozambique or Zanzibar with a bottle of trade brandy in each hand, and you were sure of returning to your ship with a negro under each arm. When prisoners ran short, mothers sold their children for a glass of liquor; true, these brats were of no great value; but any lack of quality was made up for by their quantity.

Captain Bertrand carried on this business with credit and profit for five years, that is to say, from 1815 to 1820, and was looking forward to carrying it on for a good many more, when an unforeseen accident put an end to his life. One day as he was ascending the *Rivière des Poissons*, situated on the West Coast of Africa, in company with a Hottentot chief, who was going to hand over to him, for the consideration of two casks of rum, a party of Grands-Namaquois Negroes for which he had just negotiated, and who were booked in advance for Martinique and Guadeloupe, he happened to set foot on the tail of a boqueira that lay basking in the sun. The tail of this species of snake is, as is well known, so sensitive, that Nature has endowed this part of its body with a number of little bells, so that the traveller, warned by the sound, may avoid treading upon it. The snake rose erect as quick as lightning, and bit Captain Bertrand in the hand. The Captain, though well inured to pain, uttered a cry. The Hottentot chief turned round, saw what had happened, and said in a grave tone:—

“Man bitten, man die.”

“I know it, God help me!” answered the Captain, “and that is why I called out.”

Then, either for his own personal satisfaction, or from motives of philanthropy, and to insure that the snake which had bitten him should not bite any one else, he seized the boqueira with both hands and wrung its neck. Hardly had the brave Captain accomplished this than his strength suddenly forsook him, and he fell dead beside the reptile.



All this had happened with such rapidity that when Jacques, who was about twenty-five yards behind the Captain, came up to him, he had already turned as green as a lizard. He tried to speak, but could only stammer a few incoherent words, and expired. Ten minutes later, his body was covered with black and yellow spots, just like a poisonous fungus.

Owing to the marvellously subtle nature of the poison, decomposition set in so rapidly that to carry the Captain's body on board the *Calypso* was not to be thought of. Jacques and the twelve sailors who accompanied him dug a grave in which they laid the body, heaping over it all the stones they could find in the neighbourhood, so as to preserve it, if possible, from the ravages of hyenas and jackals. As for the snake, one of the sailors, remembering that his Uncle, who was a chemist at Brest, had requested him, in case he ever came across one of these reptiles, to try and bring it to him, carried it off to be placed later on in a phial at the door of his uncle's shop between a bottle filled with red water and another filled with blue.

There is a commercial adage which says: "Business before everything." In virtue of this adage, it was decided by the Hottentot chief and Jacques that this catastrophe should not stand in the way of carrying out the bargain which had been concluded. Accordingly Jacques went to fetch from the neighbouring kraal the fifty Grands-Namaquois who had been sold; after which the Hottentot chief brought away from the brig the promised casks of rum. Having effected this exchange the two dealers separated, each delighted with the other, and with the mutual promise that their commercial relations should be renewed on a future occasion.

The same evening Jacques piped all hands on deck, from the boatswain's mate to the junior cabin-boy, and after touching briefly but eloquently on the numerous good qualities that had distinguished Captain Bertrand, he made two propositions to the crew; first, to dispose of the complete cargo and then of the ship, which was readily saleable, and, after distributing the proceeds of the whole in the customary proportions, to part good friends, and each to seek his fortune in whatever direction pleased him;

or secondly, to appoint a successor to Captain Bertrand and continue the business under the style of "*Calypso and Co.*," declaring beforehand that, though he was the Lieutenant, he would submit to be re-elected, and would be the first to recognise the new Captain appointed as the result of the ballot. These words were followed by the very appropriate result that Jacques was elected Captain by acclamation.

Jacques immediately chose as his Lieutenant the boatswain's mate, a worthy Breton hailing from Lorient, who was usually called, in allusion to the remarkable toughness of his skull, M. Tête de Fer.

The same evening the *Calypso*, with shorter memory than the nymph whose name she bore, sailed for the Antilles, already consoled, in appearance at least, not for the departure of King Ulysses, but for the death of Captain Bertrand.

However, if she had lost one master, she had found another, and quite as good a one. The late Captain was one of those old sea-dogs who do everything by rule of thumb rather than by calculation. This was not the case with Jacques, who was always guided by circumstances, and was an all-round man in every branch of seamanship, knowing as well as any Admiral how to give orders in a battle or storm, yet, if occasion required, making a sailor's knot as well as the youngest cabin-boy. Jacques was never idle, and, consequently, never felt dull. Each day witnessed some improvement in the trim or rigging of the schooner. Jacques was as fond of the *Calypso* as a man is of his mistress, and so his thoughts were constantly employed in adding something to her adornment; now it was a sail, the shape of which he altered, now a yard, of which he simplified the working. And so, like the coquette that she was, she obeyed her new lord as she had never obeyed any other; roused into animation at the sound of his voice, bending and rearing under his hand, leaping beneath his feet like a horse that feels the spur, she and Jacques appeared so admirably matched, that you could not imagine it possible that henceforth one could live apart from the other.

So, but for the recollection of his father and brother, which occasionally clouded his brow, Jacques was happier than any man on land or sea. He was

not one of those grasping Slave-Captains who lose half their profits by trying to gain too much, and in whom cruelty, after passing into a habit, becomes a pleasure. No, he was a decent trader, carrying on his business conscientiously, treating his Kaffirs, his Hottentots, his Senegambians and Mozambiques with almost as much care as if they had been bags of sugar, chests of rice, or bales of cotton. They were well fed, had straw to lie on, and took exercise on deck twice a day. Only the refractory ones were chained, and, speaking generally, he endeavoured, as far as possible, to sell the husbands along with their wives, and the children with their mothers,—a kindness hitherto unheard of and which found but few imitators among those who followed the same profession as Jacques. The result was that his Negroes generally reached their destination in capital condition and in good spirits, so that he nearly always sold them at an enhanced price.

It is unnecessary to remark that Jacques never stayed long enough on land to form any serious attachment. As he was swimming in gold and rolling in silver, the fair Creoles of Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Cuba had more than once set their caps at him; there were even fathers who, not knowing him to be a Mulatto, and taking him for a gentlemanly European Slave-Captain, made him overtures of marriage with their daughters. But Jacques had his own ideas on the subject of love. He knew by heart his mythology and his Bible; he was acquainted with the legend of Hercules and Omphalé, and the story of Samson and Delilah. Accordingly he had resolved to have no other wife but the Calypso. As for mistresses, there were plenty of them, thank Heaven; black, red, yellow, or chocolate, according as he loaded up at the Congo, Florida, Bengal or Madagascar. Every voyage he took with him a fresh one, whom he handed over on his arrival to some friend by whom he was sure that she would be well treated; having made it his rule never to stick to the same one for fear lest, be her colour what it might, she should acquire an influence over his heart, for, it must be said, what Jacques loved before all else was his freedom.

Let us add that Jacques had a whole host of other pleasures. He was as sensuous as Creoles generally are. All the grand effects of Nature impressed him

agreeably; only, instead of stirring his spirit, they worked upon his senses. He loved the immensity of space, not because it made him think of God, but because, the greater the space, the more freely you breathe; he loved the stars, not because he conceived of them as so many worlds circling in space, but because it was pleasant to see overhead an azure canopy studded with diamonds; he loved the lofty forests, not because their depths were full of mysterious and romantic voices, but because their dense vault cast a shade through which the sun's rays could not penetrate.

As for his opinion on the business in which he was engaged, he looked upon it as a perfectly lawful occupation. He had seen Negroes bought and sold all his life, and so he honestly believed that they were made to be bought and sold. As for the validity of the right claimed by men to traffic in their fellow-creatures, that in no way concerned him. He bought and paid; consequently, the goods were his, and, from the moment he bought and paid for them, he had the right to sell them again. Never had he imitated the example of his fellow-captains, whom he had seen hunting down Negroes on their own account; he would have looked upon it as a fearful injustice personally to seize upon a free creature, whether by force or by stratagem, in order to make a slave of him. But, the moment that free creature had become a slave through circumstances for which Jacques was not responsible, he made no scruples about bargaining for him with his owner.

You can understand, then, that Jacques' life was a pleasant one, all the more so as, now and then, there came days of fighting, as in the time of Captain Bertrand. The trading in blacks had been abolished by a Congress of Governments, which had probably discovered that it affected injuriously the trade in whites; so that it sometimes happened that vessels which meddled in what was no business of theirs, peremptorily demanded to know what the Calypso was doing on the coast of Senegal or in the Indian seas. Then, if it was one of Captain Jacques' good-humoured days, he began by amusing the too inquisitive vessels by running up flags of all colours; next, when he was tired of playing charades, he would hoist his own flag, three Negroes' heads sable, two and one on a field gules; upon which the



Calypso took to her heels, and the fun began.

In addition to the twenty guns which adorned her port-holes, the Calypso possessed, with a view to such occasions only, two thirty-six pounders astern, superior in range to those of ordinary ships; now, as she was a splendid sailor, and obeyed implicitly her master's nod, she hoisted just so much sail as was required to keep the pursuer within range of these two guns. The result was that, while the shots from the enemy fell uselessly in her wake, each of her own shots (and Jacques as you may suppose, had not forgotten his business as a gunner) raked from bow to stern the vessel that displayed such an interest in Negroes. This went on for as long as Jacques chose to play what he called his game of skittles; then when he considered the ship to have been sufficiently punished for her indiscretion, he added sundry royals and top-gallant stud-ding sails, with some spankers of his own invention, to the sail already set, despatched a couple of shots in token of farewell to his partner in the sport, and, skimming over the water like some belated bird making for its nest, left her to plug her holes, put her rigging in order, and repair her halliards, disappeared on the horizon.

These pranks, as you will readily understand, made the business of entering harbours somewhat risky; but the Calypso was a jilt who could alter her figure and even her face, as circumstances required. Sometimes she assumed some artless name and a guileless look, calling herself *la belle Jenny* or *la Jeune Olympe*, and appeared with an air of innocence quite pleasant to behold, having, as she said, just freighted tea at Canton, coffee at Mocha, or spices at Ceylon. She displayed samples of her cargo, took orders, and inquired for passengers. Captain Jacques became an honest native of Lower Brittany, with his big jacket, long hair, and broad hat, all the cast-off wardrobe, in fact, of the defunct Bertrand. Sometimes the Calypso changed her sex; was called *le Sphinx* or *le Léonidas*; her crew assumed French uniforms, and she entered harbour, flying the white flag, courteously saluting the fort, which returned her salute as courteously. Then the Captain would be, according to his whim, either a seaman, fuming, swearing and cursing, talking of nothing but port

and starboard, not knowing what was the use of the land except to put in at from time to time for fresh water or to dry his fish. Or again, he would be some dandy young Officer just fresh from College, to whom the Government, to recompense the services of his ancestors, had given an appointment which a dozen Officers of long standing were applying for. In this case, Captain Jacques called himself M. de Kergouran or M. de Champ-Fleury; he was short-sighted, looked at you with a blinking eye, and lisped. All this would have been soon recognised as a piece of acting in a French or English harbour, but it enjoyed an enormous success in Cuba, in Martinique, in Guadeloupe or Java.

As to the investment of the money which accrued from his trade, Jacques, who did not understand movements of *agio* or rates of discount, had a very simple plan: in exchange for his gold or bank notes he took from Visapore or Gujerat the finest diamonds he could find in those places, so that he had come to be almost as good a judge of diamonds as he was of Negroes. Next he placed the newly-purchased stones, with those bought previously, in a belt which he always wore. When he ran short of money he rummaged in his belt and extracted, according to his needs, a stone as large as a pea or a diamond the size of a nut, walked into a Jew's shop, had it weighed, and let him have it at the tariff price. Then, like Cleopatra, who drank the pearls which Anthony gave her, he ate and drank away his diamond; only, unlike the Queen of Egypt, Jacques usually made it last for several meals.

Thanks to this method of investing money, Jacques always carried on his person property to the value of two or three million francs, which, as he could hold it, literally, in the hollow of his hand, was easily concealed should occasion demand. For Jacques did not disguise from himself that a profession like his had its unlucky side; that the business which he carried on was not all a bed of roses, and that after years of good fortune he might meet with a day of reverse.

But, while awaiting this unlucky day, Jacques led, as we have said, a very pleasant life, and would not have exchanged positions with any monarch in the world, seeing that at this date to be a King was already beginning to be a very

poor amusement. Thus our adventurer would have been perfectly happy, had not the recollection of his father and Georges occasionally saddened his thoughts; so, one fine day, he could hold out no longer, and having freighted in Senegambia and Congo, and then come on to complete his cargo on the coasts of Mozambique and Zanzibar, he determined to go on to the Isle of France, and inquire if his father had not left it, or if his brother had not returned to it. Accordingly, on approaching the coast, he had made the signals usually adopted by Slave-ships and had received a corresponding reply. Chance had brought it about that these signals were exchanged between father and son; so that, the same evening, Jacques found himself not only on his native shore, but also in the arms of the very persons he had come to seek.

## CHAPTER XV

### PANDORA'S BOX

IT was, as you will readily believe, a great happiness for the father and brothers who had not seen each other for so long a time to find themselves thus once more together, just when they least expected it. True, Georges at the first moment, thanks to his European education, experienced a feeling of regret at finding his brother a merchant of human flesh; but this first feeling soon disappeared. As for Pierre Munier, who had never left the Island, and who necessarily therefore looked at everything from the Colonial point of view, he took no notice of it at all; besides, the poor father was entirely absorbed in the unlooked-for delight of seeing his sons again.

Jacques, as was quite natural, returned to sleep at Moka. He and Georges and their father did not separate until well on into the night. During the first delightful chat each revealed to these intimates of his soul all that was in his own heart. Pierre Munier poured forth his joy, his sole topic being his paternal love. Jacques related his life of adventure, his strange amusements, his eccentric happiness.

Then came Georges' turn, and Georges related the story of his love.

On hearing this, Pierre Munier trembled in all his limbs. Georges, a Mulatto, and the son of a Mulatto, loved a white girl, and declared, while confessing his love, that this girl should be his wife. Such arrogance was an unheard-of audacity and unprecedented in the Colonies, and would draw down upon the man in whose heart it had been kindled all the sorrows of earth and all the wrath of heaven.

As for Jacques, he quite understood Georges loving a white girl, although, for many reasons, which he detailed with admirable logic, he much preferred black women for his own part. But Jacques was too much of a philosopher not to understand and respect the tastes of others. Besides he considered that Georges, handsome, wealthy and superior to other men as he was, might aspire to the hand of any white girl whatsoever, were she Aline herself, Queen of Golconda!

In any case he suggested to Georges a plan that would greatly simplify matters; namely, that in case of a refusal on the part of M. de Malmédie, he should carry off Sara and deposit her in some corner of the world, wherever Georges chose, to which he might go and join her. Georges thanked his brother for his obliging offer, which however, he declined as he had at the moment decided upon another plan.

Next day the three met again almost before daybreak, so much was there fresh to tell one another that had been forgotten the previous evening. At about eleven o'clock Jacques felt a longing to visit all the spots where his childhood had been spent, and proposed to his father and brother a walk round the estate by way of reviving the memories of his early days. Pierre Munier agreed to this; but Georges, as the reader will remember, was expecting news from the town. So he was obliged to let the two go off together and to remain at the house, where he had directed Miko-Miko to meet him.

At the end of half-an-hour Georges saw his messenger appear; he was carrying his long bamboo rod and his two baskets, just as though he had been doing business in the town; for the prudent trader had thought it possible that he might meet, on his way, some fancier of Chinese work-



manship. Georges, in spite of the power of self-control which he had been at such pains to acquire, went to open the door with beating heart, for this man had seen Sara and would speak to him about her.

Everything had happened in the most natural manner, as you may easily suppose. Miko-Miko, making use of his privilege of gaining admittance everywhere, had gone into M. de Malmédie's house, and Bijou, who had already seen his young mistress purchase a fan from the Chinaman, had taken him straight to Sara's apartments.

On seeing the dealer, Sara started; for, by a perfectly natural connection of ideas and circumstances, Miko-Miko brought back Georges to her mind. Accordingly she welcomed him with eagerness, having but one regret, namely, at being compelled to converse with him by signs.

Miko-Miko then drew from his pocket Georges' card, on which he had written, with his own hand, the prices of the different objects which Miko-Miko had thought likely to take Sara's fancy, and gave it to the girl with the side on which its owner's name was engraved uppermost.

Sara blushed involuntarily and turned the card over quickly. It was clear that Georges, being unable to see her, employed this means of recalling himself to her memory. She bought, without any bargaining, all the articles of which the price had been written in the young man's handwriting, and, as the dealer did not think of asking to have the card returned, neither did she think of giving it back to him.

On coming out from Sara's apartments, Miko-Miko was stopped by Henri, who in his turn took him to his rooms to inspect his stock. Henri bought nothing at that moment, but gave Miko-Miko to understand that, being on the point of marrying his cousin, he wanted some of the choicest knick-knacks which the dealer could procure for him.

This double visit to the girl and her cousin had given Miko-Miko the opportunity of examining the house in detail. Now, as Miko-Miko, among the bumps that adorned his bare skull, had the bump of locality developed in the highest degree, he had perfectly retained in his memory the arrangements of the buildings constituting M. de Malmédie's house.

The house had three entrances:—one which led, as we have said, by a bridge

over the stream, into the *Jardin de la Compagnie*; the second, at the back, led, by means of a winding path planted with trees, into the *Rue du Gouvernement*; and, lastly, the third, which was a side entrance, opened into the *Rue de la Comédie*.

Approaching the house by its main entrance, that is to say, by the bridge which crossed the stream and led to the *Jardin de la Compagnie*, you found yourself in a large square Court, planted with mango-trees and China lilacs, through whose foliage and flowers you saw, directly opposite, the principal dwelling, which was entered by a door almost in a line with the one leading from the street; standing at this main entrance you had, first of all, the Negroes' quarters to your right, the stables to your left. Further on, on the right stood a summer-house shaded by a magnificent "dragon's blood," and opposite it, on the left, a second building, also reserved for the slaves. Last of all, you saw on the left the side entrance leading to the *Rue de la Comédie*, and on the right a path leading to a little staircase and winding on until it reached the lane, planted with trees, which formed a terrace opposite the Theatre.

From this, if you have followed clearly the description we have just given, you will see that the summer-house was separated from the main body of the house by the passage. Now, as this summer-house was Sara's favourite retreat, and as she spent the greater part of her time there, the reader will permit us to add a few words to what we have already said in a preceding chapter.

This summer-house had four fronts, although it was itself visible only on three sides, since the fourth side abutted on to the Negroes' quarters. The other three overlooked, one, the Entrance Court planted with mango-trees, China lilies, and the dragon's blood; another, the passage leading to the little staircase, the third overlooked a large wood-yard, almost deserted; while the wood-yard, in its turn, overlooked, on one side, the same stream which flowed past one flank of M. de Malmédie's house; on the other, the lane planted with trees, which was about twelve feet above the level of the wood-yard. Leaning against this lane were two or three buildings the roofs of which, slightly inclined, offered an easy access to anybody who, from any motive, should desire to avoid the public path and slip

down unobserved from the lane into the wood-yard.

The summer-house had three windows and a door leading, as we have said, into the Court. One of the windows was close to this door, the second looked on to the passage, and the third on to the wood-yard.

During Miko-Miko's narrative Georges smiled thrice, but with very different expressions; first, when his messenger told him that Sara had kept the card; secondly, when he mentioned Henri's marriage with his cousin; lastly, on hearing that it was possible to enter the summer-house by the window facing the wood-yard.

Georges put pencil and paper in front of Miko-Miko, and, while the latter, to make things doubly sure, drew a plan of the house, Georges took up a pen and began to write a letter.

This letter and the plan of the house were completed simultaneously.

Then Georges got up and fetched from his room a wonderful little Buhl cabinet, worthy of having belonged to Madame de Pompadour, placed inside it the letter he had just written, locked the cabinet, and handed both to Miko-Miko, giving him his instructions. Miko-Miko next received another doubloon in payment for the fresh commission he was about to undertake, and then, balancing his bamboo rod on his shoulder once more, took the road to the town at the same pace at which he had come, which would bring him to Sara's abode in somewhere about four hours.

Just as Miko-Miko had disappeared from sight at the end of the avenue of trees leading to the plantation, Jacques and his father entered through a gate behind. Georges, who had been on the point of starting to meet them, was surprised at their quick return; but Jacques had seen in the skies signs that foretold a storm, and though he had absolute confidence in M. Tête-de-Fer, his Lieutenant, he was much too fond of the Calypso to entrust her safety to another in such a crisis. So he came back to bid his brother good-bye; for, from the top of the *Montagne du Pouce*, which he had climbed to see if the Calypso still remained at her station, he had seen her tacking about at nearly two miles distance from the shore, and had then made the signal arranged between the Lieutenant and himself, in case circumstances should

compel him to return on board. His signal had been observed, and Jacques had no doubt but that in two hours the boat that had brought him ashore would be ready to take him back.

Poor old M. Munier had done all he could to keep his son with him, but Jacques had answered quietly:—

"It is impossible, father."

And the firm, though tender, manner in which he said this had convinced the old man that his son had fully made up his mind, so he pressed him no further.

As for Georges, he so thoroughly entered into the motive which took Jacques back on board, that he did not even attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. Only, he declared that he and his father would go with him as far as the ridge of the Pieterbot, from the opposite side of which they could see Jacques embark, and, once on the sea, follow him with their eyes as far as the ship.

Jacques accordingly started accompanied by Georges and his father, and the three, taking paths known only to sportsmen, reached the source of the *Rivière des Calebasses*. There Jacques took leave of his father and brother, whom he had seen for so short a time, giving a solemn promise to visit them again before long.

An hour later, the boat had left the shore with Jacques, who, loyal to the love which a sailor feels for his ship, went back to save the Calypso or perish with her.

The moment Jacques was on board, the schooner, which had been tacking to and fro off shore till then, headed for the *Ile de Sable*, and sheered off to the Northward as quick as possible.

Meanwhile sky and sea had assumed a more and more threatening aspect. The sea roared loudly and was visibly rising, although the tide was still on the ebb; while the sky, as though wishing to rival the ocean, rolled along hurrying masses of clouds that parted suddenly to give passage to squalls of wind varying from east-south-east to south-east and south-south-east. These symptoms, however, to any one but a sailor, betokened only an ordinary tempest. Several times previously during the year the aspect of things had appeared as threatening without being followed by any catastrophe. But on entering the house, Georges and his father were obliged to acknowledge how sagacious the prognostications of Jacques had



been. The mercury in the barometer had sunk to below twenty-eight inches.

Pierre Munier at once ordered the overseer to have all the stalks of the manioc cut in order to protect the roots, which, if this precaution is neglected, are nearly always torn up from the ground and carried off by the wind.

Georges, in his turn, ordered Ali to have Antrim saddled by eight o'clock. On hearing this order Pierre Munier started.

"What do you want your horse saddled for?" he asked in alarm.

"I have to be at the town at ten, father," answered Georges.

"But, my poor lad, it is impossible!" cried the old man.

"I must, father," said Georges.

And in the tone of these words, as in those of Jacques, the unhappy father recognised such a determination, that he dropped his head with a sigh and insisted no further.

Meanwhile Miko-Miko was fulfilling his mission.

No sooner did he reach Port-Louis than he made for M. de Malmédie's house, now doubly open to him owing to the order given by Henri. He presented himself this time with even more confidence, since in passing the harbour he had seen M. de Malmédie and his son occupied in watching the ships riding at anchor, whose skippers, in expectation of the threatening storm, were laying out extra anchors. Accordingly he entered the house without fear of being disturbed by anybody while transacting his business, and Bijou, who had seen Miko-Miko that same morning in conference with his young master as well as with her whom he already regarded as his young mistress, took him straight to Sara, who, as usual, was in the summer-house.

As Georges had anticipated, among all the fresh objects which the dealer offered to the curiosity of the young Creole, the charming Buhl cabinet at once attracted her notice. Sara took it up, turned it round and round, and, having admired the outside, wished to examine it within, and asked for the key to open it, upon which Miko-Miko pretended to search for it everywhere, but without success. Finally he intimated by signs that he had not got it, and had doubtless forgotten it at home, but would go and fetch it; so he went off at once leaving behind the

cabinet and promising to return with the key.

Ten minutes later, while the girl, with childish eagerness and curiosity was turning the wonderful cabinet backwards and forwards, Bijou entered and gave her the key, which Miko-Miko had been satisfied to send by the hands of a Negro-messenger. Little mattered it to Sara how the key reached her, so long as it did reach her; so she took it from the hands of Bijou, who withdrew quickly to close all the shutters of the house that were threatened by the storm. Sara, left alone, hastened to open the cabinet, which, as we know, contained nothing but a piece of paper, not even sealed, but folded in four.

Georges had anticipated everything, and made every calculation.

Sara must be alone at the moment when she discovered the letter, and the letter must be open so that Sara could not send it back and say that she had not read it.

Accordingly Sara, seeing she was quite alone, hesitated for a moment; guessing, however, from whom the letter came, and carried away by curiosity, by love, in short, by the thousand feelings which surge in a young girl's bosom, she could not resist the desire to see what Georges had written to her, but with much agitation and a great deal of blushing, took the letter, unfolded it, and read as follows:—

"Sara,

"I have no need to tell you I love you, for you know it; the dream of my life has been to find a companion like yourself. Now there are exceptional cases, supreme in one's life, when all the conventionalities of society break down in the presence of an overwhelming necessity.

"Sara, do you love me?

"Weigh carefully what your life with M. de Malmédie will be, weigh carefully what your life will be with me.

"With him, the respect of all men.

"With me, the scorn of all men,—except the few able to rise superior to deeply-rooted prejudice.

"Only, I repeat, I love you, more than any man on earth has ever loved you, or ever will. I know that M. de Malmédie is hurrying on the hour when he will become your husband. There is, then, no time to be lost; you are free, Sara; lay your hand on your heart, and decide between M. Henri and myself.

"Your answer I shall hold sacred as a mother's commands. This evening, at ten o'clock, I shall be at the summer-house to receive it.

"GEORGES."

Sara glanced around her in terror. It seemed as though on turning round, she would see Georges.

At this moment the door opened and, instead of Georges, Sara saw Henri appear; she hid the letter in her bosom.

Henri generally, as we have seen, chose unfortunate times for his interviews with his cousin, and on this occasion he was no more happily inspired than usual. It was an inopportune moment for appearing before Sara, taken up as she was with her thoughts of another.

"Forgive me, Sara dear," said Henri, "for coming in thus unannounced, but it seems to me, whatever you may think about it, that, situated as we are, and going to be, in a fortnight, man and wife, such freedom is permissible. Besides, I have come to tell you that, if you have any nice flowers outside that you care for particularly, you would do well to bring them indoors."

"Why?" asked Sara.

"Don't you see there is a storm brewing, and that it would be better for flowers, as well as for people, to be indoors than out to-night?"

"Oh! good heavens!" cried Sara, thinking of Georges, "will there be any danger then?"

"Not for those of us who have solid houses," said Henri; "but for the poor wretches who live in huts or who have business in the streets, yes; and I shouldn't like to be in their place."

"Do you really think so, Henri?"

"Think so? by George, I do! There, do you hear?"

"What?"

"The cypresses in the Jardin de la Compagnie."

"Yes, I hear. They are moaning; it is a sure sign of tempest, is it not?"

"And look at the sky, how black it is. So, I repeat, Sara, if you have any flowers to bring in, you have no time to lose; I am going to shut up my dogs in the kennels."

And Henri went out to put his pack under shelter from the storm.

Night, in truth, was coming on with unusual rapidity, for the sky was covered with great, black clouds; from time to time gusts of wind shook the house, then

all became still again, but it was that oppressive stillness that seems the agony of gasping Nature. Sara looked out into the Courtyard and saw the mango-trees shivering as though they were endowed with feeling and had a presentiment of the coming struggle between wind, earth and sky, while the China lilacs drooped their flowers sadly towards the ground. At this sight the girl was seized with deadly terror, and clasped her hands together, murmuring:—

"Oh God! protect him."

At this instant Sara heard her Uncle's voice calling her, and opened the door.

"Sara," said M. de Malmédie, "Sara, come here, my child, you won't be safe in the summer-house."

"Here I am, Uncle," said the girl, shutting the door and turning the key after her, lest any one should go in in her absence.

But instead of joining Henri and his father, Sara went into her own room. A moment later M. de Malmédie came to see what she was doing there, and found her on her knees before the crucifix at the foot of her bed.

"What are you doing there," said he, "instead of coming to have your tea with us?"

"Uncle," answered Sara, "I am praying for all wayfarers abroad to-night."

"Oh! indeed," said M. de Malmédie. "I am sure there won't be a man in the whole island such a fool as to stir out of doors in this weather."

"Heaven grant it, Uncle," said Sara.

And she continued her prayers.

There was, in fact, no longer room for doubt that the event which Jacques, sailor as he was, had foretold at a glance, was to be accomplished; one of those terrible hurricanes, which are the terror of the Colonies, threatened the Isle of France. Night, as we have said, had come on with alarming swiftness, but the lightning flashes followed each other with such rapidity and brightness that this darkness was replaced by a blue, livid light which gave to all objects the sickly hue of those extinct worlds which Byron represents Cain as visiting under the guidance of Satan. Each of the short intervals during which the almost incessant lightning allowed the darkness to reign was filled with heavy peals of thunder, which, starting from behind the mountains, seemed to roll over their



slopes, passed above the town and died away in the depths of the horizon. Then, as we have said, mighty gusts of wind followed the travelling thunder-claps and passed over in their turn, bowing as if they had been willow rods the stoutest trees, which rose up again slowly and fearfully, only to bend and moan and sigh once more beneath some fresh squall, ever fiercer than the preceding one.

It was especially in the centre of the Island, in the district of Moka and the Williams plains, that the hurricane, as if delighting in its liberty, was grandest to behold. Pierre Munier was therefore doubly terrified at seeing Jacques start off and Georges ready to start as well, but, always feeble in presence of any moral force, the poor father had yielded, and, though shuddering at the roaring of the wind, turning pale at the growling of the thunder, and starting at each fresh lightning flash, did not even attempt to keep Georges back. As for the young man, you would have said that he rose to greater heights of hardihood, the nearer he approached the danger. In contrast to his father, at each threatening roar he raised his head; at each flash of lightning he smiled; you would have said that he who had hitherto battled in every human strife, longed, like Don Juan, to battle with his Creator.

So when the hour for his departure had arrived, with that inflexible determination which was the distinctive result of the education—we will not say which he had received, but which he had given himself—Georges approached his father and gave him his hand, and, without seeming to understand the old man's reluctance, went out with as firm a step and as composed a face as though he were leaving the house in quite ordinary circumstances. At the door he met Ali who, with the passive obedience of Orientals, was holding Antrim ready saddled. The son of the desert neighed and reared as though he sniffed the hiss of the Simoon, or the roar of the Khamsin; but, on hearing his rider's well-known voice, seemed to calm down, and turned his wild eye and foaming nostrils towards him. Georges patted him for a moment on the shoulder, and spoke a few words in Arabic; then, with the lightness of a perfect horseman, jumped into the saddle without the aid of the stirrup. At the same moment Ali let go of the bridle, and Antrim dashed

off like lightning without Georges even noticing his father, who, to avoid losing sight of his favourite son sooner than he could help it, had partly opened the door, and followed him with his eyes until he disappeared at the end of the avenue leading up to the house.

It was, indeed, wonderful to see the intrepid rider borne along as rapidly as the hurricane through which he passed, overleaping space, like Faust hurrying to the Brocken on his infernal steed. All around him were disorder and confusion. Nothing was to be heard save the crash of trees, broken by the beating of the storm. Sugar-canes and manioc plants torn from their roots were flying through the air like feathers carried by the wind. Birds, surprised in their sleep and whirled away in a flight which they could not control, wheeled round Georges, uttering shrill cries, while occasionally a terrified stag crossed the road swift as an arrow. Georges was now happy, for he felt his heart swell with pride; he alone was calm amidst this universal confusion, and, while all around him was bending and breaking, he alone pursued his course towards the goal determined by his will, suffering nothing to turn him from his path, or divert him from his purpose.

He went on thus for about an hour, leaping over trunks of fallen trees, streams that had swollen into torrents, and rocks that had been torn from their roots and rolled down from the mountain-top; then he perceived the sea, tossing its dark waves, foaming and roaring, as it beat with terrific din against the shore, as though the hand of God could no longer restrain it. Georges reached the foot of the *Montagne des Signaux*; he turned its base, still carried onwards by his steed's impetuous career, crossed the *Pont Bourgeois*, turned to the right up the *Rue de la Côte-d'Or*, passed behind the walls of the *Quartier* and, crossing the rampart, descended by the *Rue de la Rampe* into the *Jardin de la Compagnie*. Thence making his way through the deserted streets in the midst of fragments of fallen chimneys, tottering walls, and flying tiles, he followed the *Rue de la Comédie*, then turned sharp to the right up the *Rue du Gouvernement*, plunged into the blind alley opposite the Theatre, jumped down from his horse, opened the wicket which separated the alley from the lane planted with trees,

that overlooked M. de Malmédie's house, closed the gate to behind him, and threw his bridle over Antrim's neck, who, having no outlet, could not run away. Then, letting himself slide down the roofs abutting on the lane, and jumping from them to the ground, he found himself in the wood-yard, into which opened the windows of the summer-house we have already described.

Meanwhile, Sara was in her room, listening to the roaring of the gale, crossing herself at each flash of lightning, praying unceasingly, calling upon the tempest, for she hoped that the tempest might stop Georges. Then starting suddenly as she told herself that when a man such as her lover says that he will do a thing, do it he will, though the whole world should fall upon his head. Then she besought God to calm the wind and quench the lightning; she saw Georges crushed beneath some tree, overwhelmed by some rock, rolling at the bottom of some torrent; and she realised in alarm how strong and swift an influence her rescuer had acquired over her; she felt that all resistance to what so attracted her was useless, that all struggle, in short, was vain against that love, born but the day before, yet already so powerful. She knew her poor heart could but struggle and groan, acknowledging itself vanquished without having so much as tried to show fight.

As the hour advanced, Sara's excitement became more intense. With eyes fixed on the clock, she followed the movement of the hands, and a voice whispered in her heart that, as the hand marked each minute, Georges was coming nearer. The hand pointed in succession to nine o'clock, half-past nine, a quarter to ten, and the storm, far from diminishing, became every moment more appalling. The house shook to its foundations; you would have thought each instant that the wind would tear it from its base. From time to time, midst the wail of the cypresses and the cries of the Negroes, whose huts, less solid than the houses of the Whites, were demolished by the breath of a hurricane just as a child blows down the house of cards which he has erected, you could hear, in answer to the thunder, the mournful appeal of some building in distress imploring help that no human being could render it.

Among all these various sounds that echoed the destruction that was going

on, Sara thought she heard a horse neighing.

Then she got up suddenly; her resolve was taken. The man who through the midst of such dangers, when the bravest were quaking in their houses, came to her across uprooted forests, swollen torrents, yawning gulfs, and all to say "I love you, Sara! do you love me?" this man was truly worthy of her. And if Georges had done this, Georges who had saved her life, then she belonged to Georges as he belonged to her. It was no longer a resolution formed by her free will; a hand divine bowed her, without her being able to resist it, beneath a pre-ordained destiny; it was no longer hers to choose her lot, but passively to obey her fate.

Then with that firmness imparted by a crisis, Sara quitted her room, reached the end of the corridor, descended by the little outer staircase we have mentioned, which seemed to quake beneath her feet, found herself at the corner of the square Courtyard, went on, stumbling against fragments at each step, and leaning against the wall of the summer-house so as not to be blown down by the wind, until she reached the door. At the moment she turned the handle, the lightning flashed, showing her the mango-trees all twisted, the lilacs dishevelled, her flowers crushed; then only did she fully realise the depths of the convulsion in which Nature was struggling, and thought that perhaps she would wait in vain, and that Georges would not come, not because he feared to come, but because he was dead. In face of this idea, everything disappeared, and Sara quickly entered the summer-house.

"Thank you, Sara," said a voice that startled her to the depths of her heart, "thank you! Oh! I was not mistaken; you love me, Sara; bless you a hundred times!"

And Sara felt a hand that grasped her own, a heart beating against hers, a breath that mingled with her breath. An unknown sensation, rapid, devouring, ran through all her frame; panting, distracted, bending over her as a flower bends upon its stalk, she fell upon Georges' shoulder, having exhausted, in the struggle which she had maintained for two hours, all the strength that she possessed, and only able to murmur:—

"Georges! Georges! have pity on me!"

Georges understood this appeal from weakness to strength, from the modesty



of the girl to the loyalty of her lover. It may be he had come with a different object, but he felt from that moment Sara was his; that any favour obtained from the maid would be so much ravished from the bride, and, though quivering himself with love, desire, and happiness, contented himself with drawing her closer to the window to see her by the flash of the lighting, and, laying his head on that of the young Creole, said:—

"You are mine, Sara, are you not? mine for life?"

"Oh! yes, yes, for life!" murmured the girl.

"Nothing shall ever part us, but death?"

"Nothing but death."

"You swear it, Sara?"

"By my mother! Georges!"

"Good!" said the young man, trembling both with joy and pride. "From this moment you are my wife, Sara, and woe to him who tries to rob me of you!"

At these words Georges pressed his lips on those of the girl, and, dreading doubtless lest he should no longer control himself in the presence of such love, and youth, and beauty, dashed into the neighbouring room, the window of which, like that of the summer-house, overlooked the wood-yard, and disappeared.

At this moment there was such a deafening peal of thunder that Sara fell upon her knees. Almost immediately the door of the summer-house opened and M. de Malmédie and Henri entered.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW

**D**URING the night the hurricane ceased, but it was not until the next morning that the havoc due to it could be properly estimated.

Many of the ships lying in the harbour had sustained very considerable damage; several had been dashed against one another and seriously injured.

The majority had been dismasted and swept bare like sheer hulks; two or three had dragged their anchors and grounded

on the Ile des Tonneliers. Lastly, one had sunk in the harbour and perished, crew and cargo, without any one being able to afford her the slightest assistance.

On land, the destruction was no less great. Few of the houses of Port-Louis had altogether escaped the terrible cataclysm. Nearly all such as were covered with shingles, slates, tiles, copper or tin, had had their roofs carried away. Only those which were terminated by *argamasses*, that is to say, by terraces in the Indian fashion, had offered a complete resistance. So, next morning the streets were found strewn with fragments, and some of the buildings were only kept upright upon their foundations by the aid of numerous struts.

All the stands erected on the Champ-de-Mars in preparation for the races had been blown down. Two heavy guns belonging to the Battery near the *Grand-Rivière*, had been overturned by the wind and were found in the morning lying in an opposite direction to that in which they had been left the evening before.

The interior of the Island presented an aspect no less deplorable. What was left of the harvest, which happily had been almost all got in, had been torn up out of the ground; in several places whole acres of forest presented the appearance of wheat laid by the hail. Scarcely any tree standing by itself had been able to resist the hurricane, and even the tamarinds, those pre-eminently flexible trees, had been broken off short,—a thing hitherto regarded as an impossibility.

The house of M. de Malmédie, one of the highest in Port-Louis, had suffered greatly. There had even been a moment when the shocks had been so violent, that M. de Malmédie and his son determined to seek refuge in the summer-house, which, being built entirely of stone, with only one storey, and sheltered by the terrace, evidently afforded less hold to the wind. Henri had therefore run to his cousin's room, but, finding it empty, concluded that Sara, like his father and himself, had thought of seeking refuge in the summer-house, where, upon going down, they found her. The reason for her being there was quite natural, and her terror required no excuse. Consequently neither father nor son suspected for a moment the cause which had made Sara leave her room, but assigned it to a feeling of fear, from which they themselves had not been

exempt. Towards dawn, as we have said, the tempest lulled. But, though nobody had slept all night, they dared not seek repose as yet, and each individual occupied himself in examining what amount of personal loss would fall upon him. The Governor, on his side, as soon as it was light, visited all the streets in the town, putting the garrison at the disposal of the inhabitants. The result was that, even before night fell, some portion of the traces left by the catastrophe had disappeared.

Everybody was doing his very best to restore to Port-Louis the aspect it had worn the day before, inasmuch as the festival of the Yamsé, one of the greatest solemnities in the Isle of France, was approaching. Now as this festival, the name of which is probably unknown in Europe, is intimately connected with the events of this story, we ask the reader's permission to make a few introductory remarks on the subject, which are necessary for our purpose.

Everybody knows that the great Mahometan family is divided into two sects, not merely different, but even hostile; namely, the *Sunnite* and the *Shyite*. The one, to which the Arab and Turkish populations belong, recognise Abu-Bekr, Omar and Osman as the legitimate successors of Mahomet; the other, consisting of the Persians and Mussulman inhabitants of India, look upon the three Caliphs as usurpers, and assert that Ali, the son-in-law and minister of the Prophet, had the sole right to his political and religious inheritance. In the course of the long wars waged by the pretenders, Hosein, Ali's son, was seized, near the town of Kerbela, by a band of soldiers sent by Omar in pursuit of him, and the young Prince, together with sixty of his relatives who accompanied him, was massacred after a heroic defence.

It is the anniversary of this ill-fated event which is celebrated every year with a solemn festival by the Mahometans of India, and is called the Yamsé, from a corruption of the cries of "Va Hosein! ô Hosein!" repeated in chorus by the Persians. They have, moreover, transformed the festival as well as the name, by introducing into it certain customs of their native country and ceremonies belonging to their ancient religion.

Well, it was on the following Monday, being the day of the full moon, that the

Lascars, who represent the Indian *Shyites* in the Isle of France, were to celebrate the Yamsé according to their custom, and to afford the Colony the spectacle of this strange ceremony, which was looked forward to with even greater curiosity than in preceding years.

In fact an unwonted circumstance was to render the festival on this occasion more magnificent than it had ever been before. The Lascars are divided into two bands, the Lascars of the sea and the Lascars of the land; those of the sea being distinguished by their green robes, and those of the land by their white robes. Each band ordinarily celebrates the festival in its own way with the greatest amount of display and splendour possible, trying to outshine its rival; the result is an emulation which resolves itself into disputes, and the disputes degenerate into quarrels. Then the sea Lascars, who are poorer but more courageous than those of the land, often avenge themselves for the financial superiority of their opponents with sticks and sometimes even with swords, and the police are obliged to interfere to prevent fatal results.

But this year, thanks to the active intervention of an unknown merchant who was inspired no doubt by religious zeal, the two parties had abandoned their jealousies, and had united, so as to form but one body. Accordingly, as we have said, the report had been generally spread abroad that the solemnity would be at once more peaceful and more brilliant than in preceding years.

You can readily understand that, in a place where there is so little diversion as in the Isle of France, this festival, always regarded with curiosity, even by those who have witnessed it from childhood, is awaited with impatience. For three months beforehand it is the chief topic of conversation, and people talk of nothing else but the *gouhn*, which is to be the chief ornament of the fête.

The said *gouhn* is a kind of pagoda made of bamboo, consisting generally of three storeys one above the other, each narrower than the one below, and covered with paper of all colours. Each of these storeys is constructed in a separate hut, square like itself, one of its four sides being eventually demolished to admit of the edifice inside being removed. These three floors are then placed inside a fourth hut, high enough to allow of their



being erected one above the other. The whole fabric is then joined together with ropes, and the finishing touch put both to its general appearance and its several details. Moreover, in order to arrive at a result worthy of the proposed structure, the Lascars often four months beforehand search the whole Colony through for the most skilful workmen; Hindoos, Chinese, free blacks and black slaves, are all put under contribution. Only instead of paying these last their daily wage, it is handed over to their masters.

Among all the individual losses which each inhabitant had to deplore the news was received with general delight that the house containing the *gouhn*, which had already reached a state of completion, had escaped all damage, sheltered as it was behind a spur of the *Montagne du Pouce*. Nothing then would be wanting this year to the festival, which the Governor, in celebration of his arrival, had supplemented by public races, reserving to himself with aristocratic liberality the right of giving the prizes, on condition that owners should ride their own horses, after the fashion of gentlemen riders in England.

So, as you see, everything concurred to make the pleasure to which all were looking forward soon efface the disagreeable experience which they had just gone through.

Sara, contrary to her wont, absorbed as she was by thoughts unknown to those about her, appeared to take no interest in a solemnity which, in previous years, had given her a much appreciated opportunity of exhibiting her fascinations.

For the whole aristocracy of the Isle of France was in the habit of appearing at the races, as well as at the Yamsé, either in stands expressly erected or in open carriages; in either case it was an opportunity for the handsome Creoles of Port-Louis to air their showy elegance. Naturally, therefore, it created surprise that Sara, on whom the announcement of a ball or any spectacle whatsoever generally produced such an impression, now remained so indifferent to what was going on. Henrietta herself, who had brought the girl up, and could read her mind to its depths, as though it were the clearest crystal, could not make her out at all, and became lost in thought on the subject.

Let us hasten to say that "ma mie

Henriette,"—whose return to Port-Louis we have not had the opportunity, amid such grave incidents, to mention,—had been so alarmed during the night of the storm that, although not yet recovered from the effects of the incident that had so agitated her, she had started from the *Rivière Noire* as soon as the gale had ceased, and arrived in the course of the day at Port-Louis, where she had now been for two days in the company of her young charge, whose unaccustomed absentmindedness was beginning, as we said, to cause her serious uneasiness.

The fact is that during the last three days a great change had taken place in the girl's life. From the moment when she saw Georges for the first time, the face and appearance, nay, even the very voice, of the handsome young fellow had dwelt in her heart. Then, with an involuntary sigh, she had thought more than once of her future marriage with Henri, a marriage to which, for the last ten years, she had given her tacit consent, owing to the fact that she had never expected that circumstances could arise which would render it an obligation impossible for her to fulfil. But from the day of the banquet with the Governor, she had felt that to take her cousin as a husband would be to condemn herself to perpetual unhappiness. Finally, there came a time, as we have seen, when not only had this fear become a conviction, but when she had given a solemn promise to Georges that she would never belong to any one but him. Well, you will allow that here was a situation calculated to make a girl of sixteen reflect seriously, and to make her regard as of less importance all those fêtes and amusements which hitherto she had looked upon as the chief events of her life.

Neither had M. de Malmédie and his son been free from anxiety during the last five or six days. Sara's refusal to dance with anyone else from the time she declined to dance with Georges, her retirement from the ball when it was just opening, whereas as a rule she was the last to come away; her persistent silence, whenever her cousin or her uncle broached the question of her coming marriage, all this seemed to them unnatural. Accordingly they had both decided that the preparations for the wedding should go forward without saying anything more about it to Sara, and that she should only be informed, when everything was in readiness. This course was

all the easier, inasmuch as no definite time had ever been fixed for the marriage, while Sara, who had just reached the age of sixteen, was quite old enough to fulfil the purpose which M. de Malmédie had always entertained with regard to her.

All these individual anxieties constituted a general pre-occupation, which had for three or four days imparted a coolness and a feeling of constraint to the meetings which took place between the different persons who lived in M. de Malmédie's house. These meetings generally occurred four times a day; in the morning, at the breakfast hour; at two o'clock, which was the hour for dinner; at five, which was the tea hour; and at nine, which was the time for supper.

For three days Sara had requested and obtained breakfast in her own room. At this meal embarrassment and constraint, saved up, as it were, from the previous day, always prevailed; but there still remained three daily meetings which she could not avoid, except by making illness her excuse. Well, this excuse could not last for very long, so Sara hardened her heart, and came down at the accustomed hours.

On the third day after the storm, Sara was seated accordingly at five o'clock in the large drawing-room, working near the window at some embroidery which necessitated her keeping her eyes lowered. Henrietta was giving to the teamaking all the attention which English ladies usually bestow on that important occupation, and M. de Malmédie and his son were standing before the fire-place talking in low tones, when suddenly the door opened and Bijou announced Lord Murray and M. Georges Munier.

This double announcement affected each of those present differently, as you will readily understand. MM. de Malmédie, thinking they had heard wrongly, made Bijou repeat the names. Sara blushed and lowered her head over her work, while Henrietta, who had just opened the tap of the tea-urn, was so confused that, occupied in looking successively at the MM. de Malmédie, Sara, and Bijou, she let the boiling water overflow, which now began to trickle from the urn over the table and from the table to the ground.

Bijou repeated the names he had already pronounced, accompanying them with the most agreeable smile he could assume.

M. de Malmédie and his son looked at one another with increasing astonishment; then M. de Malmédie, feeling that the situation must be put an end to, said:—

"Show them in."

Lord Murray and Georges entered, both dressed in dark coats, which denoted a visit of ceremony.

M. de Malmédie took a step or two towards them, while Sara rose blushing, and, after a timid bow, sat down again, or rather fell down again on her chair, and Henrietta, noticing the thoughtless act which her astonishment had caused, hastily turned the tap of the urn.

Bijou, at a sign from his master, brought forward two arm-chairs, but Georges bowed to indicate that they were unnecessary, and that he would stand.

"Sir," said the Governor, addressing M. de Malmédie, "here is M. Georges Munier, who has begged me to accompany him to your house, and support by my presence a request which he has to make of you. As I am sincerely anxious that this request should be granted, I have thought I ought not to refuse to take this step which, besides, procures me the honour of seeing you." The Governor bowed, and the two men answered by a similar movement.

"We are under an obligation to M. Georges Munier," said M. de Malmédie at last; "we shall therefore be delighted to be of service to him in any way."

"If you mean by that, sir," answered Georges, "to allude to the pleasure I have had in saving Mademoiselle from the danger in which she was placed, allow me to declare to you that all the gratitude is due from me to God, who brought me there to do what any one else would have done in my place. Besides," added Georges, with a smile, "you will see presently that my conduct on that occasion was not free from selfishness."

"Excuse me, sir, but I do not understand you," said Henri.

"Make your mind easy, sir," replied Georges, "you will not be long in doubt of my meaning, which I am about to explain clearly."

"We are listening to you, sir."

"Shall I retire, Uncle?" asked Sara.

"If I dared hope," said Georges, half turning and with a bow, "that a wish expressed by me would influence you,



Mademoiselle, I would beg you, on the contrary, to remain."

Sara sat down again. There was a moment's silence ; then M. de Malmédie indicated by a gesture that he was waiting.

"Monsieur," said Georges in a perfectly calm tone, "you know me, you know my family, you know my fortune. I am worth at this moment two million francs. Forgive my entering into these details, but they are unavoidable."

"All the same, sir, I must confess," replied Henri, "that I fail to see how they can interest us."

"Well, it is not as a matter of fact to you that I am speaking, sir," said Georges, preserving the same calmness of voice and demeanour, while Henri showed a visible impatience, "but to your father."

"Allow me to tell you, sir, that I do not see that my father, either, requires such information."

"You will understand it presently, sir," replied Georges coldly.

Then, fixing his eyes upon M. de Malmédie, he continued :—

"I have come to ask you for the hand of Mademoiselle Sara."

"For whom?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"For myself, sir," answered Georges.

"For yourself!" cried Henri, making a movement which the young Mulatto checked by a stern look.

Sara turned pale.

"For yourself?" asked M. de Malmédie.

"For myself, sir," replied Georges with a bow.

"But," cried M. de Malmédie, "you know quite well, sir, that my niece is destined for my son?"

"By whom, sir?" asked the young Mulatto in his turn.

"By whom, by whom! . . . Why! by me," said M. de Malmédie.

"I would observe to you, sir," replied Georges, "that Mademoiselle Sara is not your daughter, but only your niece, consequently she owes you only a qualified obedience."

"But, sir, this whole discussion appears to me more than extraordinary."

"Pardon me," said Georges, "it is, on the contrary, perfectly natural. I love Mademoiselle Sara; I believe that I am destined to make her happy; I am obeying at once the desire of my heart and the duty imposed by my conscience."

"But my cousin does not love you, sir," cried Henri, allowing his natural impetuosity to carry him away.

"You are mistaken, sir," answered Georges, "and I am authorised by Mademoiselle to tell you that she does love me."

"By her! by her!" cried M. de Malmédie. "Impossible!"

"Why, cousin, do you dare?" . . . cried Henri, moving towards Sara with a gesture that looked like a threat.

Georges moved forward; the Governor restrained him.

"I now repeat unflinchingly," said Sara, answering her cousin's gesture by a look of supreme contempt, "what I have already said to M. Georges. The life which he has saved is his, and I will never belong to any other but him."

And, at these words, with a gesture full of grace and dignity, the gesture of a Queen, she extended her hand to Georges, who bent over it and placed a kiss there.

"Ah! this is too much!" cried Henri, lifting a cane which he held in his hand.

But Lord Murray checked Henri, as he had already checked Georges.

As for Georges, he contented himself with a contemptuous smile at Henri, and then led Sara to the door, bowing once more. Sara, in her turn, bowed, signed to Henrietta to follow her, and went out with her. Georges came back.

"You have seen what has passed, sir," said he to Sarah's Uncle. "You no longer doubt the feelings which Mademoiselle entertains towards me. I venture then to ask you a second time for a positive answer to the request which I have the honour to address to you."

"An answer, sir!" cried M. de Malmédie in his turn; "an answer! Have you the audacity to expect that I shall make you any answer than the one you deserve?"

"I do not dictate to you, sir, what answer you should give me; only, be it what it may, I beg you to give me one."

"I should hope you don't expect anything but a refusal?" cried Henri.

"It is your father I am asking, and not you, sir," answered Georges; "allow your father to answer me, and we will discuss our affairs afterwards."

"Well, sir," said M. de Malmédie, "understand that I refuse absolutely."

"Very well, sir," answered Georges;

"I expected that answer, but courtesy required that I should make you the application, and I have done so."

And Georges bowed to M. de Malmédie with the same politeness and ease as if nothing had passed between them; then, turning to Henri:—

"Now, sir," said he, "as regards us two, if you please. This is the second time, recollect, at an interval of fourteen years, that you have lifted your hand to me,—the first time with a sword in it."

He lifted his hair, and pointed with his finger to the scar which furrowed his brow.

"The second time with that cane."

And he pointed to the cane which Henri held.

"Well?" said Henri.

"Well," said Georges, "I demand satisfaction for these two insults. You are a brave man, I know, and I hope that you will answer as a man the appeal which I make to your courage."

"I am glad, sir, you are acquainted with my bravery, though your opinion on that point is indifferent to me," answered Henri with a sneer; "it puts me at my ease in the answer I have to give you."

"And what is that answer, sir?" asked Georges.

"The answer is that your second request is at least as presumptuous as the first. I do not fight with a Mulatto."

Georges turned deadly pale, yet an inscrutable smile strayed across his lips.

"That is your last word?" he said.

"Yes, sir," answered Henri.

"Very good, sir," replied Georges; "now I know what I have got to do."

And, saluting M. de Malmédie and his son, he withdrew, followed by the Governor.

"I warned you how it would be, sir," said Lord Murray, as they reached the door.

"And you told me nothing I did not know already, my lord," answered Georges; "but I have returned here to accomplish a destiny, and I must see it out to the end. I have a prejudice to combat: it must crush me, or I must kill it. Meanwhile, my lord, accept my grateful thanks."

Georges bowed, and, grasping the hand which the Governor held out to him, crossed the Jardin de la Compagnie. Lord Murray followed him with his eyes

as long as he remained in sight; then, when he had disappeared at the corner of the *Rue de la Rampe*, he shook his head, saying to himself sadly:—

"There is a man going straight to his own destruction. It is a pity truly; there was something noble in that heart of his."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE RACES

THE festival of the Yamsé began on the following Saturday, and the town had decked itself, in honour of the day, with such bravery that it was hard to realise that but six days previously it had all but been destroyed.

At early morning the Sea Lascars and the Land Lascars, now united in a single band, started from the Malabar encampment situated outside the town between the brook *des Pucelles* and the *Fanfaron* brook, and, preceded by barbaric strains of music from tambourines, flutes and jews' harps, took the road to Port-Louis, in order to make what is called the *quête*, or collection. The two chiefs walked side by side, dressed according to the party which they represented, one in a green, the other in a white, robe, and each carrying a drawn sabre with an orange fixed upon its point. Behind them walked two Mullahs, each holding in both hands a plate filled with sugar and covered with leaves of China roses; next, after the Mullahs came, in fairly good order, the phalanx of native devotees.

The collection began at the first houses in the town; for, doubtless in a spirit of equality, the collectors do not despise the smallest huts, the offerings from which, as in the case of the wealthiest houses, are intended to defray a part of the enormous expense which all this poor population has incurred in order to render the ceremony as splendid as possible. Further, it must be stated, the method of begging adopted by the collectors is affected by the pride characteristic of Orientals, and, far from being low and servile, exhibits something noble and touching. After the chiefs, to whom all doors are opened, have saluted the owners of the house by



lowering the points of their sabres before them, the Mullah advances and offers to the spectators sugar and rose leaves. Meanwhile other natives, selected by the chiefs, receive in plates the gifts which have been made to them; then they all withdraw, saying, "*Salaam*." In this way they seem not so much to receive alms, as to invite those who are strangers to their creed to a symbolic communion, by sharing with them in a fraternal way the expenses of their worship and their religious offerings. Usually the collection extends not only, as we have said, to all the houses in the town, but even to the ships in the harbour, to solicit from which is the province of the Sea Lascars. But on this occasion, as regards this last item, the collection was much curtailed, the majority of the vessels having suffered so greatly in the hurricane that their Captains felt more need of help than disposed to give it. However, at the very moment when the collectors had reached the quay, a ship which had been signalled that morning appeared between the Labour-donnaie Redoubt and Fort Blanc, and entered the harbour, flying the Dutch flag, with all sails set, saluting the fort which returned her salute gun for gun. She must no doubt have been a long way from the Island when the hurricane occurred, for not a rope in her rigging was missing, and she came onward, leaning over so gracefully the hand of some marine goddess might have been pushing her along the surface of the water. From a distance, by the aid of glasses, you could see her whole crew on deck, in the full uniform of King William, as if they had donned festival costume on purpose to be present at the ceremony. So you may guess that, thanks to its joyous and prosperous appearance, this vessel became at once the object aimed at by both chiefs. Consequently, hardly had she cast anchor ere the leader of the Sea Lascars got into a boat, and, accompanied by his plate-bearers and a dozen of his followers, put off towards the vessel, which certainly did not belie, when seen close at hand, the favourable opinion she had inspired at a distance.

Indeed, if ever Dutch spruceness, so famed all the world over, deserved a hearty eulogy, it was at the sight of this gallant ship, which appeared as the floating embodiment of that spruceness; her deck washed, sponged and polished might

have contested the prize for elegance with the parquet floor of the most sumptuous drawing-room. Her copper-work shone like gold; the companion-ladders, carved in the most precious Indian wood, seemed rather for ornament than for purposes of ordinary utility. As for her guns, you would have called them guns *de luxe*, intended more for a museum of artillery than for the armoury of a ship.

Captain Van den Broek—for such was the name of the master of this charming vessel—seemed to know what the business was which brought the Lascars on board, for he went to the head of the ladder to receive the chief, and, having spoken a few words to him in his own language, which proved that this was not the first time he had sailed the Indian seas, placed upon the plate held out to him, not a piece of gold, nor a rouleau of silver, but a nice little diamond worth, perhaps, a hundred louis, apologising for having no other money at the moment, and begging the chief of the Lascars to be satisfied with this offering. This gift so far exceeded the anticipations of the worthy adherent of Ali, and was so little in harmony with the natural thriftiness of the compatriots of John de Witt, that the chief of the Lascars hesitated a moment, not venturing to take such liberality seriously, and it was not until Captain Van den Broek had assured him three or four times over that the diamond was really intended for the *Shyite* band, with whose efforts he declared himself fully in sympathy, that the Lascar thanked him and presented to him with his own hands the plate of rose leaves powdered with sugar. The Captain gracefully took a small pinch, which he raised to his mouth and pretended to eat, to the great satisfaction of the Indians, who did not leave the hospitable ship until after many '*Salaams*.' Then they continued their collection elsewhere, but without finding that the story which they told every one of the fine windfall which had fallen to them from the sky was successful in producing a similar donation.

The day was spent in this way, each preparing himself rather for the festival of the morrow than taking part in the proceedings of this day, which are only, so to speak, the prologue to the play.

On the morrow the races were to take place. Now, the ordinary races were already a great institution in the Island; but the present ones, occurring in the

midst of the other fêtes and, above all, being given by the Governor, were going to surpass as you may suppose, anything of the kind seen before.

The Champ-de-Mars was, as usual, the spot chosen for the fête, and all the unreserved space had been crowded with sight-seers from early in the morning; for although the great race, that of the gentlemen jockeys, was the chief attraction of the day, it was by no means the only one. It was to be preceded by other events of a comic nature, which, for the populace especially, were all the more interesting, inasmuch as they themselves would take part in them. These introductory sports were a pig-hunt, a sack race, and a pony race. The Governor had offered a prize for each of these, as he had done for the big race. The winner of the pony race was to receive a splendid double-barrelled gun by Manton; of the sack race, a fine umbrella; while the winner in the pig-hunt kept the pig itself as a prize.

The prize for the great race was a silver-gilt cup of the finest design, and less valuable for its material than for its workmanship.

We have said that from early in the morning the ground open to the public was thronged with spectators, but it was not until about ten o'clock that the fashionable people began to put in an appearance. As in London, Paris, or anywhere, in short, where there are races, stands had been reserved for the upper ten; but, whether from caprice, or to avoid being jumbled up together, the prettiest women in Port-Louis had decided to attend the races in their carriages, and, with the exception of those who had been invited to it with the Governor, were all drawn up in line opposite the winning-post or at points of vantage nearest to him, leaving the other stands to the townspeople or inferior merchants.

The young men were, for the most part, on horseback, ready to follow the runners in the inner circle; while the gentlemen who were members of the Isle of France Jockey Club were on the lawn, making bets with all the reckless nonchalance and prodigality characteristic of Creoles.

By half-past ten the whole of Port-Louis was assembled in the Champ-de-Mars. Among the prettiest women in the most elegant carriages might be noticed Mademoiselle Conder and Mademoiselle Cypris de Gersigny, at that time one of the

loveliest girls, to-day still one of the loveliest women, in the Isle of France, whose magnificent dark hair has become proverbial, even in the salons of Paris; lastly, there were the six Demoiselles Druhn, so fair, so white, so fresh, so graceful, that the carriage in which they generally drove out all together was called the "Basket of Roses."

The Governor's stand might also have deserved on this particular day the name given on ordinary days to the carriage of the Demoiselles Druhn. Any one who has not travelled in the Colonies, and who has not, in particular, visited the Isle of France, is unable to form an idea of the charm and grace of all these Creole faces with their velvet eyes and jet-black hair, among which were sprinkled, like flowers of the North, some of the pale daughters of England, with their transparent skin, aerial hair, and swan-like necks. In the opinion of the young men, the bouquets in the hands of all these fair onlookers, would in all probability have been far more valuable prizes than all the cups by Odier, all the guns by Manton, and all the umbrellas by Verdier, which the Governor, in his magnificent liberality, could have offered them.

In the front row of Lord Murray's stand was Sara, placed between M. de Malmédie and 'ma mie Henriette,' while Henri was on the lawn taking all the odds staked against him, though it must be admitted these were not very numerous. For, in addition to his being a splendid rider, with a great reputation on the race-course, he owned at that moment a horse which was considered to be the fastest ever seen in the Island.

At eleven, the garrison band, placed between the two stands, gave the signal for the first race, which was, as we have said, the pig-hunt.

The reader is acquainted with this comic amusement, which is a popular diversion in many French villages. The tail of a pig is smeared with lard, and the competitors endeavour one after the other to hold the animal, being allowed to grasp it only by the said tail. The man who succeeds in stopping him is the winner. This race taking place on the public ground, and every one having a right to take a part in it, no entries have been made.

Two Negroes brought in the animal—a fine pig of the largest size, greased beforehand, and all ready to enter the lists.



On seeing it there was a general shout, and Negroes, Hindoos, Malays, Madagascans and natives, bursting the barrier which had hitherto been respected, rushed at the animal, which, in astonishment at this onslaught, started to run away.

Precautions had however been taken that he should not escape from his pursuers; the poor animal had his two forelegs tied to the hind ones, much in the way that horses' feet are hobbled to restrict them to a walking pace. The result was that the pig, being unable to go at more than a very moderate trot, was soon overtaken, and the disappointments of the competitors began once more.

As you may well suppose, the chances of winning in such a game do not rest with those who make the first attempts. It is impossible to retain a grasp of the newly-greased tail, and the pig eludes his antagonists without any difficulty; but, as the first layers of lard are removed in the successive attempts to grasp its tail, the animal comes slowly to perceive that the pretensions of those who hope to stop him are not so ridiculous as he at first thought them. At times even, when he is pressed too hard, he turns round upon his most determined foes, who then, according to the degree of courage with which nature has endowed them, either pursue their object or relinquish it. At last comes the moment when the tail, deprived of all adventitious aid, and reduced to its natural substance, only slips with difficulty, and finally betrays its owner, who struggles, grunts, utters unavailing cries, and finds himself by general acclamation adjudicated to the winner.

On this occasion the chase followed its usual course of progress. The unhappy pig freed himself with the greatest ease from his first pursuers, and, though hampered by his bonds, began to escape from the enclosure over the Martyrs' Common. But a dozen of the best and most active runners dashed upon his heels, making successive grabs at the tail of the poor animal with a rapidity that did not allow him a moment's peace, and which must have warned him that, however bravely delayed, the hour of his defeat approached. As a matter of fact, five or six of his antagonists, breathless and panting, now gave up the struggle. But, in proportion as the number of claimants diminished, the chances of those who still stuck to it

increased, and they thereupon became doubly active and skilful, being further encouraged by the shouts of the spectators.

In the number of the competitors, and among those who seemed determined to see the matter through, were two of our old acquaintances, namely, Antonio the Malay, and Miko-Miko the Chinaman. Both had pursued the pig from the start, and had not lost sight of him for a moment. More than a hundred times already had the tail slipped through their hands; but, each time this happened, they felt that they were making way; and these fruitless attempts, far from discouraging them, had only added fresh fuel to their ardour. At last, having tired out all the other competitors, there remained only these two. It was then that the struggle became really interesting, and that the serious betting began.

The chase continued for another ten minutes or so; so that after having made almost the entire round of the Champ-de-Mars, the pig had come to what is called in sporting parlance his last push, and was squealing, grunting, and wriggling, without this heroic defence appearing in the least degree to disconcert his two enemies, who held on by turns to his tail with a regularity worthy of the shepherds of Virgil. At last Antonio stopped the fugitive for a moment, and was thought to have won. But the animal, collecting all his strength, shook himself off so vigorously, that, for the hundredth time, the tail slipped once more from between the Malay's hands, while Miko-Miko, who was on the look out, seized it instantly, and all Antonio's chances appeared to be transferred to himself. Then you saw him, in a manner worthy of the hopes which part of the spectators had reposed in him, holding on with both hands, stiffening his legs and being dragged along, tugging with might and main, followed by the Malay, who was shaking his head, as though he thought the game was up, but nevertheless held himself in readiness to take the other's place. He kept close alongside the pig, letting his long arms hang down and, almost without the need of stooping, rubbing his hands in the sand, in order to give them a better grip. Unfortunately, all this commendable pertinacity seemed thrown away, as Miko-Miko seemed on the point of carrying off the prize. After dragging the Chinaman along for about

ten yards, the pig looked like giving in, and came to a stand-still, still straining forward, but checked by an equal force that dragged him from behind; and, as these two equal forces neutralised each other, both pig and Chinaman remained for a time quite motionless, each making violent efforts, the one to advance, the other to hold his ground, and all to the loud plaudits of the crowd. Things remained in this position for a few seconds, and to all appearance were likely to continue so for the required time, when suddenly the two antagonists were seen to part with a violent jerk. The pig rolled over in front, while Miko-Miko rolled over behind at the same moment, only the one sprawled upon his belly, and the other upon his back. Antonio at once rushed in eagerly, encouraged by shouts from all those who were interested in his success, and who now felt sure of victory. But his delight was short-lived, and his disappointment a cruel one; for at the moment of seizing the animal by the part specified in the programme, he looked for that part in vain. The unlucky pig no longer owned a tail! This appendage had remained in the hands of Miko-Miko, who got up in triumph, holding out his trophy and appealing to the impartial verdict of the public.

The case was a novel one. It was referred to the decision of the Judges, who, after a short deliberation, declared, by three votes to two, that inasmuch as Miko-Miko would indubitably have stopped the animal if the latter had not elected to part with his tail, he must be considered the winner.

Miko-Miko's name was accordingly proclaimed, and he was authorised to carry off the prize which belonged to him. To this the Chinaman, to whom the result was intimated by signs, responded by seizing his property by the hind-legs and marching it off in front of him as you would push a wheelbarrow, while Antonio retired grumbling into the crowd, which, with that instinct of justice which characterises the populace, gave him that honourable reception which it generally bestows in cases of bad fortune.

As generally happens on the conclusion of an event which has engaged all the attention of the spectators, there was now a good deal of bustle and conversation among the crowd; but these were soon arrested by the announcement that the

sack-race was about to commence, and everybody resumed his place, having enjoyed the first event too much to run the risk of losing a sight of the second.

The distance to be run by the competitors was from the *Dreaper* post to the Governor's stand, or about a hundred and fifty yards. On the signal being given, the runners, fifty in number, jumped out of a hut that had been put up as a dressing-room, and ranged themselves in a line.

To account for the large number of competitors who presented themselves for this race, it must be remembered that the prize was, as we have said, a magnificent umbrella, and an umbrella has always been in the Colonies, and especially in the Isle of France, the Negro's chief object of ambition. Whence has this idea sprung, amounting as it does, almost to a monomania with them?

I, for my part, cannot tell, and men more learned than myself have made it the subject of deep but fruitless research. We simply state a fact, without assigning a reason; but certainly the Governor had been well advised in choosing the article in question as the prize for the sack race.

There are none of our readers who have not, once in their lives, witnessed a similar race; each of the competitors for the prize is tied up in a sack, the mouth of which is fastened round his neck, his arms and legs being enclosed. Under such circumstances, it is not a matter of running, but of jumping; well this kind of race, which is always sufficiently comic, becomes still more so in present conditions, for the drollery is increased by the strange heads surmounting the sacks, which present a curious assortment of different colours, this race, like the pig-hunt, being confined to Negroes and Hindoos.

In the front rank of those who had acquired a reputation from numerous victories in this kind of race were Télémaque and Bijou, who, having inherited the feuds of the families to which they belonged, rarely met without exchanging abusive remarks, remarks which often, to the credit of their valour be it said, led to a vigorous exchange of fisticuffs; but, on this occasion, as their hands were not free, and their feet were confined, in addition to their being separated by three or four of their comrades, they contented themselves with turning up the whites of their eyes at each other. At the last moment a fifty-first starter sprang out of the hut



and joined the company; this was Antonio the Malay, who had been defeated in the first race.

On the signal being given, they looked for all the world like a herd of kangaroos, jumping in the most grotesque fashion, bumping, upsetting, rolling over, getting up again, bumping again and falling again. For the first sixty yards it was impossible to forecast the winner; a dozen competitors were so close together, while the falls were so unexpected, and so altered the face of things, that, like those who run the road to Paradise, the first found themselves last, and the last first. Still, among the most experienced who were always ahead of the others, were to be seen Télémaque, Bijou, and Antonio. At a hundred yards from the start these three drew away, and the race was clearly confined to a struggle between the three.

Antonio with his customary sharpness had promptly recognised, by the furious glances which they exchanged, the hatred which Télémaque and Bijou cherished towards each other, and had reckoned upon this furious rivalry almost as much as upon his own agility. So, as chance had brought it about that he found himself placed between the two and, consequently, separating them, the wily Malay had taken advantage of one of his numerous falls to roll to one side and leave his two opponents close to each other. What he had foreseen now occurred; scarcely did Télémaque and Bijou see the obstacle which had hitherto separated them disappear, than they instantly made for each other with the most terrible grimaces, grinding their teeth like monkeys quarrelling over a nut, and interspersing this threatening pantomime with words of abuse. Happily, confined as they were in their sacks, they could not pass from words to actions; but it was easy to see, by the shaking of the canvas, that their hands were itching to avenge the abuse uttered by their tongues. Accordingly, excited by their mutual hatred, they came close alongside of one another, so that they jostled at each spring, uttering abuse of the most virulent kind and promising each other that, when once they were out of their sacks, they would have an encounter more desperate than all their preceding ones. Meanwhile Antonio was rapidly gaining on them.

On seeing the Malay, who was five or six yards ahead, a momentary truce

ensued between the two Negroes; and both endeavoured, by more gigantic leaps than they had yet made, to regain their lost advantage, indeed, both did actually begin to regain it, especially Télémaque, when a fresh fall gave him a fresh opportunity. Antonio tumbled, and, quickly as the Malay got up, Télémaque found himself with the lead.

Matters were becoming all the more serious as they were now but a dozen yards or so off the finish. Accordingly Bijou uttered a veritable roar, and, with a desperate effort, came up with his rival, but Télémaque was not the man to let himself be passed, so he continued to jump with such ever increasing agility, that you might have sworn the umbrella was already his. But, as the proverb has it, man proposes and God disposes. Télémaque tripped, staggered for a moment, and then fell amid the yells of the crowd; but in falling, still faithful to his hatred, he directed his fall in such a way as to bar the road for Bijou. The latter, whose impetus prevented his getting out of the way, stumbled over Télémaque and rolled in his turn in the dust.

Then, the same idea entered both their heads at the same moment; namely, that, sooner than allow a rival to triumph, it would be better that a third party should obtain the prize. So, to the great astonishment of the spectators, the occupants of the two sacks, instead of getting up and making for the winning-post, were no sooner on their feet than they rushed at one another, pommelling each other as fiercely as the canvas prison in which they were enclosed permitted; butting with their heads in Breton fashion, and leaving Antonio to continue in peace, free from all opposition on the part of his rivals, who, rolling one over the other, in default of feet and hands, the use of which was precluded, went for each other with their teeth.

Meanwhile Antonio arrived in triumph at the goal, fairly winning the umbrella, which was at once handed over to him and displayed by him to the applause of all the spectators, who consisted for the most part of Negroes envious of the happiness of the man who was fortunate enough to possess such a treasure.

Bijou and Télémaque, who had continued meanwhile to go for one another savagely, were eventually separated. Bijou had got off with the loss of a portion

of his nose, while Télémaque had lost part of an ear.

It was now the turn of the ponies, and some thirty little animals, all natives of Timor and Pegu, issued from the reserved enclosure with Hindoo, Malagassy, or Malay riders on their backs. Their appearance was hailed with loud acclamations, this being a race in which the black population of the Island always shows the greatest interest, since these little animals, being half wild and almost untrained, are so uncontrollable that far more unexpected accidents happen than in the ordinary races. Accordingly, shouts went up from a thousand throats in encouragement of the swarthy jockeys who rode this band of little demons, and who required all the strength and skill they possessed to hold them in and prevent their starting before the signal was given.

Presently, at a sign from the Governor, the start was effected, and they all rushed, or, rather, flew off, for they much more resembled a flock of birds skinning the ground than a body of quadrupeds touching it with their feet. But hardly had they arrived opposite the *Malartic* memorial than, as usually happens, they began to bolt, as they say in racing phraseology, that is to say, half of them disappeared into the darkness of the woods together with their riders, despite all their efforts to keep them in the course. At the bridge, a third of those who were left had disappeared, so that on nearing the '*Dreaper*' post you could not count more than seven or eight; while one or two more, having thrown their jockeys, were galloping down the course riderless.

The race was twice round the course, so they flew like a whirlwind past the winning-post without stopping, and disappeared round the corner. Presently you heard loud shouts, then laughter, then nothing more, and every one waited vainly. All the ponies had made off, and not one was left in the course; one and all had vanished, some into the woods of the Château-d'Eau, some into the streams in the background, some over the bridge. After waiting for ten minutes, suddenly on the rising slope there appeared, without its rider, an animal which had run through the town, turned by the church, and come back by one of the streets which lead to the Champ de Mars, continuing its course at its own sweet will, instinct-

ively, and without any one to direct it; while gradually behind it you could see the other ponies beginning to appear, returning from all directions, though unfortunately too late. For in a twinkling the first pony cleared the distance that separated it from the post, passed it by fifty yards, and then stopped of its own accord, as though it understood perfectly well that it was the winner.

The prize, which, as we have said, was a fine gun by Manton, was handed to the intelligent animal's owner, a Colonist named M. Saunders.

Meanwhile the other ponies kept coming in from all directions like pigeons which have been scared by a hawk, and which, having flown off in a flock, return to the dove-cot one by one.

There were seven or eight of them lost altogether and not recovered for a day or two afterwards.

The next event being the big race, there was now an interval of half an hour, during which race-cards were distributed and bets booked.

Among those who betted with most persistence was Captain Van den Broek who, on leaving his ship, had gone straight to Viger's, the first goldsmith in the town, an Auvergnat, and like all his countrymen, renowned for his scrupulous honesty, where he had parted with 100,000 francs' worth of diamonds in exchange for bank-notes and gold. Accordingly he was quite ready to face the most desperate plungers. This he did, putting the whole of his money, to everybody's great surprise, on a horse called Antrim, a name entirely unknown in the Island.

There were four horses entered:—

Restoration	-	Colonel Dreaper.
Virginie	-	M. Rondeau de Courcy.
Gester	-	M. Henri de Malmédie.
Antrim	-	M. (the name was denoted by two asterisks).

The majority of the wagers were laid on Gester and Restoration, who at the races in the previous year had carried off the honours of the day. This year they were even stronger favourites, ridden as they were by their owners, both excellent horsemen, while Virginie was running for the first time.

Notwithstanding this, and in spite of being charitably warned that he was acting as an absolute madman, Captain Van den Broek continued to bet on Antrim, a proceeding which aroused no small curiosity



in respect to this unknown horse and his owner.

The horses being ridden by their owners, there was no need to weigh the riders, consequently there was no surprise at not seeing under the tent either Antrim or the gentleman who concealed his identity beneath the hieroglyphics which took the place of his name, and every one expected that he would suddenly appear at the starting-post and take his place in line with his competitors.

In point of fact, when the horses with their riders came out from the enclosure, the person who since the distribution of the race-cards had been the object of public curiosity was seen riding up from the direction of the Malabar encampment. But his appearance, instead of dispelling the uncertainty, served but to increase it; he was dressed in an Egyptian costume, the embroidery of which was visible beneath a hood concealing the half of his face. He rode in the Arab fashion, that is to say with short stirrups, his horse being caparisoned in the manner of the Turks. It was clear to everybody at the first glance that he was a perfect horseman. Antrim too, for no one doubted but that it was the horse entered under this name that had just appeared, Antrim, be it said, seemed to warrant the confidence reposed in him beforehand by Captain Van den Broek, so graceful, supple, and so much in harmony with his rider was his appearance.

No one recognized either horse or rider, but, as the entries had been made before the Governor, who must therefore know all about him, the incognito of the new comer was respected. One person only suspected perhaps the identity of the rider and leaned forward blushing to assure herself of the truth. That person was Sara.

The competitors drew up in a line, numbering, as we have said, four only, since the reputation of Gester and Restoration had discouraged all the other starters, and every one fancied that the race would resolve itself into a struggle between these two.

As this was only a gentlemen's race the judges had decided that the course should be a run round twice instead of once, so as to prolong the entertainment of the spectators; each horse therefore had to run about three miles, that is to say a league, which would give a greater chance

to such horses as possessed staying power.

The start was made on the dropping of the flag, but in such circumstances it is well known that you cannot determine the actual result by the position of the horses at the early stages. When the first round was half over, Virginie, who, we repeat, was running her maiden race, had gained about thirty yards and Antrim was close at her heels, while Restoration and Gester remained in the rear, being clearly held hard by their riders.

At the hill, that is to say about two thirds of the circuit, Antrim had gained half a length, while Restoration and Gester had lessened their distance by ten yards; then they looked like passing, and every one was leaning forward clapping and encouraging the riders, when Sara, either accidentally or on purpose, let fall her bouquet. The unknown horseman saw it, and, without slackening speed, slipped under his horse's belly in the manner of Arab riders picking up the *djerid*, and with wonderful skill picked up the fallen bouquet, bowed to its fair owner, and continued his course, having lost barely ten yards, which he did not appear to trouble himself in the least about regaining.

In the middle of the second round Virginie was overtaken by Restoration, followed by Gester at the distance of a length, while Antrim still kept seven or eight yards behind; but, as his rider neither pressed him with whip nor spur, it was plain that this slight interval was of no account, and that he would recover the lost ground when he thought it advisable.

At the bridge, Restoration picked up a stone and rolled over with his rider, who, not having lost his stirrups, made an effort to pull him on his legs again. The noble animal struggled, rose, and fell again immediately; his leg was broken.

The other three continued their course, Gester now leading with Virginie two lengths behind and Antrim at her heels. But, at the rise, Virginie began to lose ground, while Gester maintained his lead, though Antrim without any effort now began to gain on him. On reaching the '*Dreaper*' post not more than a length separated Antrim from his rival, and Henri, feeling himself overtaken, began to use his whip. The twenty-five thousand spectators of this fine race

applauded loudly, and waved their handkerchiefs to encourage the competitors. Then the unknown horseman bent over Antrim's neck and uttered some words in Arabic, when the intelligent animal, as though he understood what his master was saying, redoubled his speed. Now they were but twenty-five yards from the goal and opposite the first stand, Gester still leading, when the unknown, seeing that there was no time to lose, drove his spurs into his horse's flanks, rose in his stirrups, and, throwing back the hood of his burnouse, shouted to his rival:—

"M. Henri de Malmédie, for two insults that you have offered me, I return you but one; but I hope that it will be an equivalent for both of them."

And, raising his arm with these words, Georges, for it was he, struck Henri a violent blow across the face with his whip, which streaked his face with blood.

Then, plunging his spurs into Antrim, he won the race by two lengths; but, instead of waiting to claim the prize, he continued his course and disappeared, to the profound astonishment of everybody, into the woods surrounding the *Malartic* monument.

Georges was right; in exchange for two insults received from Henri de Malmédie at an interval of fourteen years he had just repaid one, but it was an insult public, terrible, bloody, one which decided his whole future, since it was not only a challenge to a rival, but a declaration of war against all whites.

Thus Georges found himself, by the irresistible march of events, brought face to face with this prejudice he had come so far over seas to encounter, and the two antagonists were to fight it out in deadly earnest as mortal enemies.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LAIZA

GEORGES was reflecting, in the retirement of the apartment which he had furnished for himself in his father's house at Moka, on the position in which he had just placed himself, when he was told that a Negro wished to see

him. He thought very naturally that this was some message from M. Henri de Malmédie, and ordered the bearer to be shown in.

The moment he saw him, however, Georges perceived that he was mistaken; he had a vague recollection of having met this man somewhere, but where, he could not say.

"Do you not recognise me?" said the Negro.

"No," answered Georges, "and yet we have met before, have we not?"

"Twice," replied the Negro.

"Where was that?"

"The first time at the *Rivière Noire*, when you saved the girl's life; the second—

"Yes, of course," interrupted Georges, "I remember; and the second?"

"The second," interrupted the Negro in his turn; "was when you gave me my liberty. I am called Laïza, and my brother's name was Nazim."

"And what has become of your brother?"

"Nazim, as a slave, wanted to escape and return to Anjouan: Nazim, now at liberty, thanks to you, has gone away and should be by now at our father's house. I thank you on his behalf."

"And you, though free, have remained behind?" asked Georges. "That seems strange."

"I will explain that," said the Negro with a smile.

"Do so," answered Georges, who was beginning, in spite of himself, to be interested in this conversation.

"I am a Chief's son," replied the Negro. "I am of mixed Arab and Zanzibar blood, so I was not born to be a slave."

Georges smiled at the Negro's pride, without reflecting that this pride was closely allied to his own, while the Negro went on without seeing or noticing his smile:—

"The chief of Querimbo took me in war and sold me to a Slave-Captain, who sold me to M. de Malmédie. I offered, if they would send a slave to Anjouan, to have myself ransomed with twenty pounds of gold dust. They would not take a slave's word and refused. I insisted for some time and then—a change occurred in my life, and I no longer thought of going away."

"Did M. de Malmédie treat you as you deserved to be treated?" asked Georges.



"No, it was not that," answered the Negro. "Three years later, my brother Nazim was captured in his turn and sold like myself, and luckily, to the same master; but not having the same reasons for remaining here as I had, he wished to escape. You know what followed, since it was you who rescued him. I loved my brother as my own child, and you," continued the Negro, crossing his hands over his breast and bending low, "you I love now as my father. Well, this is what is going on; listen, for it interests you as well as us. There are in this Island eighty-four thousand coloured men and twenty thousand whites."

"I have counted them already," said Georges with a smile.

"I suspected as much," answered Laïza. "Out of these eighty thousand, twenty thousand at least are capable of bearing arms; while the whites, including the eight hundred English soldiers in the garrison, can hardly muster four thousand men."

"I know that too," said Georges.

"Well then, do you guess?" asked Laïza.

"I am waiting until you explain."

"We have determined to rid ourselves of the whites. God knows we have suffered enough to warrant us in avenging ourselves."

"Well?" asked Georges.

"Well, we are ready," answered Laïza.

"What is stopping the way, then, and why do you not avenge yourselves?"

"We are without a leader, or rather, two have been proposed; but neither of the two is fitted for such an undertaking."

"Who are they?"

"One is Antonio the Malay."

Georges allowed a smile of contempt to pass over his lips.

"And the other?" he asked.

"The other is myself," answered Laïza.

Georges looked hard at the Negro, who exhibited to white men such an unusual example of modesty, to see in what way he was unworthy of the position to which he was summoned.

"The other is yourself?"—replied the young man.

"Yes," answered the Negro; "but we do not want two leaders for such an enterprise; we must have only one."

"Ah! yes," said Georges, understanding, as he thought, that Laïza was ambitious of having the supreme command.

"We want a single, supreme, absolute commander, one whose superiority is beyond question."

"And where are you to find this man?" asked Georges.

"He is found already," answered Laïza, looking steadily at Georges; "the only point is, will he accept the position?"

"He risks his neck," said Georges.

"And don't we also risk something?" asked Laïza.

"But what guarantee will you offer him?"

"The same as he will offer us, an end of persecution and slavery, and a future of vengeance and freedom."

"And what plan have you formed?"

"To-morrow, after the festival of the Yamsé, when the whites, wearied with the day's amusement, have retired after seeing the burning of the *gouhn*, the *Lascars* will be left alone on the banks of the *Rivière des Lataniers*. Then will gather from all quarters Africans, Malays, Madagascans, Malabars, Hindoos, all in fact who have joined the conspiracy; once there, they will choose a leader, and that leader will direct them. Well then, say but a word, and that leader will be yourself."

"And who has bidden you make this proposal to me?" asked Georges.

Laïza gave a scornful smile.

"Nobody," said he.

"The idea, then, is your own?"

"Yes."

"And who has put it into your head?"

"You have, yourself."

"How can I have done so?"

"You can only attain your desire by our aid."

"And who told you that I desired anything?"

"You desire to wed the Rose of the *Rivière Noire*, and you hate M. Henri de Malmédie. You wish to possess the first, and to have your revenge against the second. We alone can offer you the means of doing both; for they will not consent to give you the one as your wife, and they will not allow the other to fight a duel with you."

"And who told you that I loved Sara?"

"I have seen it."

"You are mistaken."

Laïza shook his head sadly.

"The eyes of the head are sometimes deceived," said he; "but the eyes of the heart, never."

"You are my rival, perhaps?" asked Georges with a smile of contempt.

"The only rival is he who has a hope of being loved," said the Negro with a sigh, "and the Rose of the *Rivière Noire* will never love the Lion of Anjouan."

"You are not jealous then?"

"You saved her life, and her life belongs to you, as is fair; I have not even had the good fortune to die for her, and yet," added the Negro, looking straight at Georges, "do you think I have not done all I could to win that privilege?"

"Yes, yes," murmured Georges, "you are a brave man; but the others, can you reckon upon them?"

"I can only answer for myself," said Laïza, "and I do so; whatever can be done with a man who is courageous, loyal, and devoted, that you can do with me."

"You will be the first to obey me?"

"In everything."

"Even as regards? . . ."

Georges stopped, and looked at Laïza.

"Even as regards the Rose of the *Rivière Noire*," said the Negro, continuing the young man's thought.

"But why are you thus devoted to me?"

"The Stag of Anjouan was about to die beneath the blows of the executioners, and you ransomed his life. The Lion of Anjouan was in the toils, and you restored him to liberty. The Lion is not only the strongest, but likewise the most generous of all animals; and because he is brave and generous," continued the Negro, crossing his arms and raising his head proudly, "therefore Laïza is called the Lion of Anjouan."

"Very well," said Georges, holding out his hand to the Negro, "I ask for one day to make up my mind."

"And what consideration will decide your acceptance or refusal?"

"I offered M. de Malmédie a very grave insult yesterday in public."

"I know, I was there," said the Negro.

"Well, if M. de Malmédie will fight with me, I have nothing to say."

"And if he declines to fight?" asked Laïza with a smile.

"In that case I will join you; for, as he is known to be a brave man, who has already fought two duels with whites, in one of which he killed his opponent, he will have added a third insult to the two which he has already offered me, and then the cup will be full,"

"Then you are our leader," said Laïza; "the White man will not fight with the Mulatto."

Georges frowned, for he entertained the same idea himself. And yet, how could a White man keep the mark of the shame which the Mulatto had imprinted on his face?

At this moment Télémaque entered with his hands pressed to his ear, of which Bijou, as we have said, had carried off a portion.

"Master," said he, "the Dutch Captain would like to speak to you."

"Captain Van den Broek?" asked Georges.

"Yes."

"Very well," said Georges. Then, turning to Laïza:—

"Wait for me here, I will come back to you; my answer will probably be more speedy than I expected."

Georges left the room where Laïza was, and entered with open arms the one in which the Captain was waiting.

"Well, brother," said the Captain, "you recognised me then?"

"Yes, Jacques, and I am delighted to embrace you, particularly at this moment."

"You very nearly missed the pleasure of doing so, at any rate on this trip."

"How so?"

"I ought to have started before now."

"Why?"

"The Governor looks to me like an old sea-fox."

"Say rather a sea-wolf, a sea-tiger, Jacques; the Governor is the famous Commodore Murray, formerly Captain of the Leicester."

"Of the Leicester! I ought to have suspected it; then we have an old account to settle, and now I understand it all."

"What has happened then?"

"This; the Governor came up to me after the races and said in a very gracious manner: 'Captain Van den Broek, you have a very smart schooner.' Nothing wrong, so far; but he added, 'Might I have the honour of paying her a visit to-morrow?'"

"He suspects something."

"Yes, and I who like a fool suspected nothing fell head over heels into the trap, and invited him to lunch on board, which he accepted."

"Well?"

"Well, on going back to give orders for the aforesaid luncheon, I noticed that they



were making signals from the *Montagne de la Découverte* out to sea, and then I began to realise that possibly these signals were being made in honour of me. So I climbed the mountain and examined the horizon with my glass, and within five minutes I sighted a vessel some twenty miles off, which was replying to the signals.

"It was the Leicester?"

"Just so; they want to blockade me. But, mark you, Jacques was not born yesterday; the wind is in the South-East, so that no vessel can enter Port-Louis except by tacking. Well, for that business, you require at least twelve hours to make the *Ile des Tonneliers*; meanwhile, I am off, and I am come to find you and take you along with me."

"Me? What reason have I for going?"

"Ah! true, I haven't told you yet. What the deuce made you take it into your head to slash that handsome young man over the face with your whip? It was not polite."

"Don't you know then who the man was?"

"Why yes, for I laid a thousand louis against him. By the way, Antrim is a fine horse and I hope you will give him my compliments."

"Well, don't you remember how this same Henri de Malmédie, fourteen years ago, on the day of the fight? . . ."

"What did he do?"

Georges lifted his hair and showed his brother the scar on his forehead.

"Oh! yes, of course," cried Jacques. "Shiver my timbers! yes, you do owe him a grudge; I had forgotten that little episode. But, so far as I can recollect, that little attention on his part earned him a blow from my fist, which made up for his sword-cut."

"Yes, and I had forgotten that first insult, or rather, I was prepared to forgive him for it, when he offered me a second."

"What was that?"

"He refused me the hand of his cousin in marriage."

"Oh! you are delightful, upon my word! Here are a father and son, who rear an heiress like a quail in a coop, so as to pluck her at their leisure by a rich marriage, and just as she is nicely fatted up, there comes along a poacher who wants to take her for himself. Why, come! could they do otherwise than refuse her to you? To say nothing, my dear

fellow, of the fact that we are Mulattos, neither more nor less."

"True, and therefore it is not this refusal which I regarded as an insult; but, in the course of the discussion, he raised his stick to me."

"Ah! in that case, he was in the wrong. Then, I suppose, you knocked him on the head?"

"No," said Georges, laughing at the methods of conciliation which, in such circumstances, always presented themselves to his brother's mind; "no, I demanded satisfaction from him."

"And he refused it? He is within his rights, for we are Mulattos. True, we sometimes fight the Whites; but the Whites do not fight with us."

"And then I promised that I would force him to fight."

"And that is why you struck him across the face with your whip in the middle of the race, *coram populo*, as we used to say at the Collège Napoléon. It was not at all a bad idea; but the means which you took have not been successful."

"Not successful! What do you mean?"

"I mean that, in point of fact, M. de Malmédie's first idea was to fight; but nobody was willing to act as his second, and his friends declared that such a duel was out of the question."

"Then he will keep the cut of the whip that I gave him; he is free to do so."

"Yes, but he is keeping something else in store for you."

"What is he keeping for me?" asked Georges with a frown.

"As the obstinate fellow was still determined to fight spite of all they could say to him, they were obliged, in order to make him give up the duel, to promise him one thing."

"And what have they promised him?"

"That one of these evenings, when you are at the town, some eight or ten of them will lie in wait for you on the road to Moka, and surprise you at the moment when you least expect it; that they will then lay you on a ladder and give you five and twenty lashes."

"The curs! but that is the punishment of Negroes!"

"Well, what are we then, we Mulattos? White Negroes, nothing else."

"They promised him that?" repeated Georges.

"Yes, in so many words."

"You are quite sure?"

"I was present. They took me for a worthy Dutchman, a pure blood; they had no suspicions about me."

"Very well!" said Georges; I have made up my mind."

"You will go with me?"

"I stay here."

"Listen," said Jacques, laying his hand on Georges' shoulder; "be persuaded by me, brother; follow the advice of an old philosopher. Don't stay behind, but come away with me!"

"Impossible! it would look as though I were running away. Besides, I love Sara."

"You love Sara? What does that mean?"

"It means that I must possess that girl or die."

"Listen, Georges, for my part I do not understand all these refinements. It is true I have never been enamoured, except of my ephemeral mistresses, who are just as good as any others, believe me. And, once you have tried them, mark you, you will be ready to exchange four white girls for a girl of the Comorin Islands, for instance. I have six of them at the present moment, and you can take your choice."

"Much obliged, Jacques. I tell you once more, I cannot leave the Isle of France."

"And I repeat that you are wrong. It is a good opportunity, such as you will not find again. I start to-night at one o'clock, as quietly as I can. Come with me, and to-morrow we shall be twenty-five leagues from here and able to laugh at all the Whites in Mauritius; not to mention that, if we catch any of them, we can administer to them, by the hands of four sailors, the gratification which they were reserving for you."

"Thank you, brother," repeated Georges; "it is impossible."

"Very well then; you are a man, and, when a man says a thing is impossible, it is really and truly impossible. So I must just go away without you."

"Yes, go; only don't go too far, and you will see something which you don't expect."

"What is that? an eclipse of the moon?"

"You will see a volcano blaze forth from the *Passe Descorne* to the *Morne Brabant*, and from Port-Louis to Mahe-

bourg, a volcano as grand as that of the Isle of Bourbon."

"Ah! that's quite another matter; you have got some idea of fire-works in your head, apparently. Come, just explain things to me a bit."

"I mean that within eight days these Whites who threaten and despise me, these Whites who would whip me like a runaway Negro, will be at my feet. That's all."

"A little revolt. . . . I understand," said Jacques. "That might be possible, if there were in the Island but two thousand men like my hundred and fifty Lascars. I say Lascars, from habit; for, thank God, there isn't one who really belongs to that wretched race: they are all worthy Bretons, brave Americans, true Dutchmen, pure-blooded Spaniards, all that is best in those four nations. But what have you got to sustain the revolt with?"

"Ten thousand slaves who have had enough of obeying, and think it is now their turn to command."

"Negroes? Pooh!" said Jacques protruding his lower lip in contempt. "Listen, Georges, I know them well, for I sell them. They stand heat well, they live on bananas, they work hard; in short, they have their qualities, and I do not wish to depreciate my merchandise. But, mark you, they make very poor soldiers. See here, not later than yesterday, at the races, the Governor asked my advice in regard to Negroes."

"In what way?"

"Yes, he said to me: 'Captain Van den Broek, you have travelled a good deal and seem to me an excellent observer; now, if you were Governor of some Island, and a revolt of Negroes took place, what should you do?'"

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him; 'My lord, I should stave in a hundred casks of spirits in the streets through which they would pass, and I should lock my door and go to bed.'"

Georges bit his lip until the blood came.

"Therefore I say again, brother, for the third time, come with me; it is the best thing you can do."

"And for the third time, brother, I answer, impossible."

"Then there is no use saying any more: embrace me, Georges."

"Good-bye, Jacques!"



"Good bye, brother : but, believe me, don't you trust to Negroes."

"You are going then?"

"Yes, by Gad, I'm not proud, and I can make a bolt for blue water, when occasion requires, as well as anybody, and go as far as ever the Leicester likes. Should she invite me to a game of skittles, she'll soon see whether I decline the offer; but, in harbour, under the fire of *Fort Blanc* and the *Labourdonnaie Redoubt*, no thank you! For the last time then, you refuse?"

"I refuse."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"The young men exchanged a second embrace. Jacques then went into his father's room and found him sleeping peacefully, in complete ignorance of all that had happened. Meantime Georges passed into the room in which Laïza was waiting for him.

"Well?" asked the Negro.

"Well," said Georges; "you may tell them that they have a leader."

The Negro crossed his hands on his breast, and, without asking another question, bowed deeply and went out.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE YAMSE

THE races, as we have said, were only an episode in the amusements of the second day. Accordingly, when they were over at about three in the afternoon, the whole of the motley multitude that covered the small mountain made off for the *Plaine Verte*, while the gentlemen and ladies of fashion who had witnessed the sports, some in carriages, some on horseback, went home to dinner, and sallied out again directly the meal was over, in order to be present at the exercises of the Lascars.

These exercises consist of symbolical gymnastic displays, including races, dances, and wrestling, accompanied by discordant songs and barbarous music, with which are mingled the shouts of the Negro vendors in the crowd, who do business on their own account or on that of

their master, and go about crying, "Bananas! bananas!" "Cane! cane!" "Curds! curds! fine curdled milk!" or "Kalu! fine kalu!"

These exercises last until about six in the evening, and then begins the 'little' procession, so called to distinguish it from the great procession of the next day.

Then the Lascars advance, between two lines of spectators, some half hidden under a sort of small pointed pagodas, made on the model of the great *gouhn*, and which are called *aïdorés*; others, armed with sticks and blunt swords; others, again, half naked and with torn garments. Then, at a given signal, they all spring into action; those who carry the *aïdorés* begin to dance round as though on a pivot; those with the sticks and sabres begin to fight, wheeling round one another, giving and parrying blows with marvellous skill; while the last beat their beasts and roll on the ground apparently in despair, all crying together or in turns: "Yamsé! Yamli! O Hoseïn! O Ali!"

While these religious performances are going on, some of their number go about offering boiled rice and aromatic herbs to all comers.

This promenade lasts until midnight; they then enter the Malabar encampment in the same order in which they had quitted it, not to come out again until the next day at the same hour.

The next day however brought a change and enlargement of the scene. After promenading the town in the same way as on the previous evening, the Lascars re-entered the camp at night fall in order to fetch from it the *gouhn*, the result of the combined work of the two bands.

Covered with the richest papers of the most brilliant and most incongruous hues, illuminated on the inside by large fires, and on the outside by paper lanterns of all colours suspended from every angle and irregular projection, shedding catarracts of changing light over its vast sides, it advanced borne along by a great number of men. Of these some were stationed inside, others on the outside, all chanting a monotonous and moonlight dirge; while in front of the *gouhn* walked the scouts, balancing at the end of a rod a dozen feet in length lanterns, torches, suns, and other fireworks. Upon this, the dance of the *aïdorés* and the hand-to-hand combats were resumed with renewed ardour, while

the devotees in torn and tattered garments began once more to smite their breasts, uttering cries of grief which were taken up by the whole crowd in alternate shouts of: "Yamsé! Yamli! O Hoseïn! O Ali!"—shouts even more prolonged and heart-rending than those uttered the day before.

The reason of this is that the *gouhn*, which accompanies them on this occasion, is intended to represent both the town of Kerbela, near which Hoseïn perished, and the tomb in which his remains were enclosed; while in addition, a naked man, painted to look like a tiger, typifies the miraculous animal who for several days guarded the corpse of the sacred Imaun. Occasionally he made a rush at the spectators, uttering a roar as though he would devour them; but a man, who walked behind him, representing his keeper, stopped him by means of a rope; while a Mullah who was placed at his side calmed him with mysterious words and magnetic gestures.

For several hours the *gouhn* was carried in procession through and round the town; after which its bearers took the road to the *Rivière des Lataniers*, followed by the entire population of Port-Louis. The festival was drawing to a close; the *gouhn* was about to be burned and buried, and everybody was anxious, after having accompanied it during its triumph, to accompany it also to its destruction.

When those who carried the immense structure reached the *Rivière des Lataniers*, they halted on its bank; then, as midnight sounded, four men approached with torches and set fire to each of its four corners. At the same moment the bearers let the *gouhn* fall into the river.

But as the river is only a mountain torrent and the base of the *gouhn* was hardly covered by the water, the flames spread rapidly over all the upper portions, and shot up like an immense spiral, mounting in wreaths towards the sky. Then came a strangely weird moment, during which, by the brightness of this transient though fierce light, you might see the thirty thousand spectators of all races shouting frantically in all languages, waving their handkerchiefs and hats, standing in groups, some on the bank itself, the rest on the surrounding rocks,—the latter, in masses darker in proportion as they receded beneath the shade

of the forest, the former, in an immense circle, seated in their palanquins or carriages, or mounted on their horses. For a moment, the water reflected the flames which it was about to extinguish; for a moment, the whole multitude surged like a sea; for a moment, the trees threw long shadows like giants rising from the ground; for a moment, the very sky was hidden by a red vapour, which made each passing cloud look like a wave of blood.

But soon the light grew fainter and fainter, and all these heads became a confused mass; the trees appeared to recede into the shade; the sky grew pale and gradually resumed its leaden hue; the heavens were covered with darker and ever darker clouds. From time to time, some portion hitherto spared by the fire burst in its turn into flames, throwing a flickering light upon the crowd and the surrounding country, and then died out again, rendering the darkness greater than before. Gradually the whole frame-work dissolved into red-hot embers, making the water in the river hiss. Finally, the last portions that remained burning were extinguished, and the sky being, as we have said, overcast with clouds, each one found himself in a darkness all the more profound as the light that preceded it had been brilliant.

Then occurred what always happens at the end of public fêtes, especially after illuminations or fireworks: namely, an outburst of loud conversation; and every one made off as fast as possible for the town, talking, laughing, and joking. The carriages started at a gallop, the Negroes trotted off with their palanquins; while the pedestrians in chattering groups followed them as fast as they could.

Whether owing to a more lively curiosity, or from the habit of dawdling natural to their kind, the Negroes and men of colour remained to the last; but at length they too disappeared, some taking the road to the Malabar encampment, others ascending by the bank of the river,—the latter plunging into the forest, the former following the sea-coast.

After a few minutes the place was entirely deserted, and a quarter-of-an-hour elapsed during which no sound was to be heard save the murmur of the water rolling between the rocks, nothing was to be seen, in the bright intervals between the clouds, save some enormous bats which plunged heavily down to the river, as if to



extinguish with their flapping wings the few embers that still remained floating on the surface, and presently rose again and disappeared into the forest.

Soon, however, a slight noise was heard and two men could be seen creeping towards the river, moving to meet one another, and coming, one from the direction of the Dumas Battery, the other from the *Montagne Longue*. When only the torrent separated them, they both rose and exchanged signals; then one of them clapped his hands three times, while the other gave three whistles.

Then out of the depths of the woods, from the angles of the fortifications, from the mangroves that waved on the margin of the sea, appeared a whole population of Negroes and Natives, whose presence five minutes earlier it would have been impossible to suspect. The entire crowd, however, was divided into two quite distinct bands, the one composed exclusively of Hindoos, the other exclusively of Negroes. The former ranged themselves round one of the two leaders who had arrived first, a man of olive complexion, who spoke in the Malay dialect.

The Negroes grouped themselves round the other leader, who was a Negro like themselves, and spoke in turns the language of Madagascar and of Mozambique.

One of the two leaders walked up and down in the crowd, chattering, scolding, declaiming, gesticulating, a type of the low-class ringleader, the vulgar intriguer. This was Antonio the Malay.

The other, calm, motionless, almost dumb, chary of words, sober in gesture, seemed to attract attention without seeking it—true type of the strength which restrains and the genius which commands.

This was Laïza, the Lion of Anjouan.

These two men were the leaders of the revolt; the ten thousand half-breeds who surrounded them were the conspirators.

Antonio addressed them first.

"There was once," said he, "an island governed by monkeys, and inhabited by elephants, lions, tigers, panthers and snakes. The number of those governed was ten times as great as the number of those who governed them; but the governing class had had the cleverness, cunning baboons that they were, to sow dissension among the governed, so that the elephants lived on terms of hatred with the lions the

tigers with the panthers, and the snakes with all of them. Consequently, when the elephants raised their trunks, the monkeys made the lions, tigers, panthers and snakes march against them; and, strong as were the elephants, it always ended in their being defeated. If it was the lions who roared, the monkeys made the elephants, the snakes, the tigers and the panthers go against them, so that, courageous as were the lions, it always ended in their being chained up. If it was the tigers who showed their teeth, the monkeys marched the elephants, the lions, the snakes and the panthers against them, and, strong as were the tigers, it always ended in their being caged. If it was the panthers who sprang, the serpents made the lions, the elephants, the tigers and the snakes march against them, so that, active as were the panthers, it always ended in their being subdued. Lastly, if it was the snakes who hissed, the monkeys made the elephants, the lions, the tigers and the panthers march against them, and cunning as were the snakes, it always ended in their being reduced to submission. The result was that the governors, with whom this device had a hundred times been successful, laughed in their sleeves every time they heard a revolt mentioned, and at once resorting to their customary tactics, suppressed the rebels. But, one day, it happened that a snake, more sharp than the rest, reflected upon this; he was a snake who knew his four rules of arithmetic just as well as M. de M . . . . . 's cashier knows them. He calculated that the monkeys were relatively to the other animals as 1 to 10. So he assembled the elephants, the lions, the tigers, the panthers and the snakes under the pretext of a festival, and said to them:

"How many do you number?"

"The animals counted themselves and answered:

"We are eighty thousand."

"Good," said the snake; "now count your masters, and tell me how many they are."

"The animals counted the monkeys and answered:

"Eight thousand."

"Then you are very foolish," said the snake, "not to exterminate the monkeys, since you are ten to one."

"The animals combined and exterminated the monkeys, and became masters of the

island, and the best of the fruits, of the fields, and of the houses were theirs; not to mention that they made the monkeys their slaves, and the she-monkeys their mistresses . . . .

"Have you understood the story?" said Antonio.

Loud shouts resounded, hurrahs and bravos were heard; Antonio had produced no less an effect with his fable than the Consul Menenius Agrippa, two thousand two hundred years before had produced with his.

Laïza waited quietly until the moment of enthusiasm had passed; then, extending his arms to command silence, he spoke these simple words:

"There was once an island where the slaves desired to be free; they rose together, and they became free. That island was formerly called San Domingo, it is now called Hayti. . . . Let us do as they did, and we shall be free like them."

Loud shouts again resounded, and hurrahs and bravos were heard for the second time. But it must be confessed that this speech was too simple to move the crowd as Antonio's had done; Antonio perceived it and conceived a hope.

He made a sign that he wished to speak, and there was silence.

"Yes," he said, "yes, Laïza has spoken the truth; I have heard tell of a large island away beyond Africa, very far off, where the sun sets, in which all the Negroes are kings. But in my own island, as in Laïza's, in the island of animals as in the island of men, a leader was chosen, but a single one."

"That is so," said Laïza, "and Antonio is right. Power divided is power weakened. I am then of his opinion; we must have a leader, but one only."

"And who shall this leader be?" asked Antonio.

"It is for those who are assembled here to decide," answered Laïza.

"The man who is worthy to be our leader," said Antonio, "is he who can pit cunning against cunning, strength against strength, courage against courage."

"That is so," said Laïza.

"The man who is worthy to be our leader," continued Antonio, "is he who has lived with both Blacks and Whites, who is connected by blood with both; the man, who, though free, will sacrifice his freedom: the man who, having a

cottage and a field, will run the risk of losing them. That is the man who is worthy to be our leader."

"True," said Laïza.

"I know but one man who combines all these qualifications," said Antonio.

"And I also," said Laïza.

"Do you mean yourself?" asked Antonio.

"No," answered Laïza.

"You agree then that I am the man?"

"No, it is not you either."

"Who is it then?" cried Antonio.

"Yes, who is it? where is he? Let him come, let him show himself!" cried the Negroes and the Natives simultaneously.

Laïza clapped his hands three times; at the same moment the gallop of a horse was heard, and by the first light of the dawning day a horseman was seen issuing from the forest at full speed. Riding into the centre of the crowd, with a simple movement of his hand he pulled up his horse so short that the jerk made the animal fall back on his haunches. Laïza extended his hand with a gesture of supreme dignity towards the horseman.

"There," said he, "is your leader."

"Georges Munier!" exclaimed ten thousand voices.

"Yes, Georges Munier," said Laïza. "You have asked for a leader who can oppose cunning to cunning, strength to strength, courage to courage; there he is! You have asked for a leader who has lived with Whites and with Blacks, who is connected by blood with both; there he is! . . . You have asked for a leader who was free and would sacrifice his freedom; who had a house and a field, and would risk the loss of both; well, there is this leader! Where will you find another? Where will you find one like him?"

Antonio remained dumbfounded; all eyes were turned towards Georges, and the crowd were talking eagerly.

Georges knew the men with whom he had to do, and knew that he must before everything else appeal to them by his appearance. Accordingly, he was dressed in a magnificent burnouse all covered with gold embroidery; beneath this he wore the tunic of honour given him by Ibrahim Pacha, on which glittered the crosses of the Legion of Honour and of Charles the Third; while Antrim, covered with a splendid crimson



saddle-cloth, quivered beneath his master, impatient and full of mettle.

"But," cried Antonio, "who will be responsible to us for him?"

"I will," said Laïza.

"Has he lived with us? Does he know our wants?"

"No, he has not lived with us; but he has lived with the Whites and has studied their sciences; yes, he knows our desires and our wants, for we have but one desire and one want, namely, freedom."

"Let him begin, then, by giving it to his own three hundred slaves."

"That has already been done this morning," said Georges.

"Yes, yes," cried voices in the crowd; "yes, Master Georges has given us our freedom."

"But he is connected with the Whites," said Antonio.

"In the presence of all of you, I declare," answered Georges, "that I broke with them yesterday."

"But he loves a white girl," said Antonio.

"That is an additional triumph for us men of colour," answered Georges, "for the white girl loves me."

"But, if they offer to give her as his wife," replied Antonio, "he will betray us and make his compact with the Whites."

"If they offer her to me, I shall refuse her," answered Georges; "for I wish to have her of her own accord, and have need of nobody to give her to me."

Antonio wished to raise a fresh objection, but shouts of "Long live Georges! long live our leader!" resounded on all sides, and drowned his voice so that he could not make a sound heard.

Georges made a sign that he wished to speak, and every one was silent.

"My friends," said he, "it is day, and, consequently, time for us to break up. Friday is a holiday; on Friday you shall all be free. On Friday, at eight in the evening, I shall be here at this same spot; I will put myself at your head, and we will march upon the town."

"Yes, yes," cried all the voices.

"One word more: should there have been a traitor among us, let us decide that, when his treachery has been proved, any one of us may put him to death that very instant, by whatever death is most convenient, slow or quick, gentle or cruel. Do you agree in advance to his

sentence? For myself; I am the first to agree."

"Yes, yes!" cried all the voices; "if there is a traitor, let him be put to death; death to the traitor!"

"Very good. And now, how many are you?"

"We are ten thousand," said Laïza.

"My three hundred servants are instructed to give each of you four dollars; for each of you by Friday next must have some weapon. Farewell then, until Friday."

And Georges, waving a salute, departed as he had come, while the three hundred Negroes each opened a bag filled with gold, and gave each man the promised four dollars.

It is true that this princely munificence cost Georges Munier two hundred thousand francs.

But what was such a sum to a man worth millions, and who would have sacrificed his entire fortune to the accomplishment of the project so long determined upon by his will?

Now, at last, this project was about to be accomplished; the gauntlet was thrown down.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE APPOINTMENT

GEORGES returned home in a much calmer frame of mind than might have been thought possible. He was one of those men to whom inaction means death, and who grow greater under the pressure of strife; he contented himself with making his weapons ready in case of an unforeseen attack, holding in reserve for himself a retreat into the great woods, which he had traversed in his youth, and of which the murmur and vastness, mingling with the murmur and vastness of the sea, had made him the pensive youth we have already seen.

But it was his unhappy father on whom the weight of all these unforeseen events really fell. The desire of his life, for fourteen years, had been to see his children again, and that desire had just been fulfilled. He had seen them both

again. But their presence had merely changed the habitual flaccidity of his temper into a constantly recurring uneasiness in regard to them,—the one, a slave-captain, perpetually at war with the elements and social laws; the other, a plotting theoriser, at war with prejudices and men; both contending with all that is most powerful in the world. Both might at any moment be shattered by the storm; while he himself, fettered by his habit of passive obedience, saw them both steering for the whirlpool without having the strength to hold them back, and having for his only consolation these words which he repeatedly incessantly :

“Of one thing, at least, I am sure, and that is, of dying with them.”

The interval which must decide the fate of Georges was a short one; two days only lay between him and the catastrophe which would make of him a second Toussaint-Louverture or a new Pétion. His one regret, during those two days, was his inability to communicate with Sara. It would have been imprudent for him to go into the town to find his usual messenger, Miko-Miko. But, on the other hand, he was reassured by his conviction that Sara was certain of him, as he was of her. There are souls that need but to exchange a glance or a word to understand each other's worth, and who, from that moment, confide in one another with the assurance of conviction. Then he smiled at the thought of this great revenge which he was about to obtain from society, and of this great reparation which fate had in store for him. He would say, when next he saw Sara: “I have not seen you for a week, but that week has been long enough to enable me to change, like a volcano, the face of an island. God desired to annihilate everything by a hurricane, and could not; while I desired to scatter men, laws and prejudices with a tempest; and I, more powerful than God, have been successful.”

There is a fascinating intoxication in political and social dangers of the kind to which Georges was exposing himself which will produce conspirators and conspiracies till the end of time. The strongest motive power of human actions is, undoubtedly, pride; and what flatters our pride, sinners as we are, more than the notion of renewing the struggle of Satan against God, or of the Titans

against Jove? In that struggle, as we know, Satan was blasted, and the Titans buried beneath Enceladus. But Enceladus, heaped upon the giants, ever belches forth a fresh mountain; Satan, though crushed, became the monarch of the infernal regions.

It is true that poor Pierre Munier did not understand such considerations as these.

So, when Georges, after opening his window, had hung his pistols by his pillow and put his sword under his bolster, and gone to sleep as calmly as though he were not sleeping over a powder-magazine, Pierre Munier, arming five or six Negroes in whom he placed confidence, had posted them as sentinels all round the house, and put himself on guard in the road from Moka. In this way a momentary retreat at least was secured for his Georges, and he did not run the risk of a surprise. The night passed without any alarm. It is, moreover, the characteristic of plots hatched among the Negroes that their secret is always scrupulously kept. These poor fellows are not yet sufficiently civilised to enter into calculations of what they may gain by treachery.

The next day passed as the preceding night had done, and the following night as the day; nothing occurred to make Georges think he had been betrayed. Only a few hours now separated him from the accomplishment of his purpose.

At about nine in the morning Laïza arrived. Georges had him admitted to his room. No change had taken place in the general arrangements; but the enthusiasm produced by the generosity of Georges was increasing. At nine in the evening the ten thousand conspirators would be assembled in arms on the banks of the *Rivière des Lataniers*; at ten the conspiracy would break out.

While Georges was questioning Laïza as to the individual disposition of the men, and reckoning up with him the chances of this perilous enterprise, he perceived in the distance his messenger Miko-Miko, who, still carrying on his shoulders his rod and baskets, was walking at his usual pace and approaching the house. His appearance could not possibly have been better timed. Since the day of the races Georges had not even set eyes on Sara.

Self-controlled as was the young man, he could not restrain himself from open-



ing the window and beckoning to Miko-Miko to quicken his pace, which the worthy Chinaman at once did. Laïza wanted to withdraw; but Georges detained him, saying that he had something further to tell him.

In point of fact, as Georges had foreseen, Miko-Miko had not come to Moka on his own initiative; immediately on entering he produced a charming little note, folded in the most aristocratic fashion, that is to say, long and narrow, on which a lady's neat hand had written his Christian name as its sole address. Georges' heart beat violently at the mere sight of the note. He took it from the messenger's hand, and to conceal his emotion—poor philosopher that he was, who dared not show the feelings of a man—went and read it in a corner of the window recess.

The letter turned out to be from Sara, and this is what it said:

"My friend,

"Be at Lord Murray's at two o'clock this afternoon, and you will learn what I hardly dare tell you, so happy does it make me. Then, when you leave him, come and see me; I shall be waiting for you in our summer-house.

"Your Sara."

Georges read this letter twice; he could make nothing of this double appointment. How could Lord Murray tell him anything that would make Sara happy, and how could he, on leaving Lord Murray, that is to say at about three o'clock, in broad daylight, and in sight of everybody, present himself at M. de Malmédie's?

Miko-Miko was the only person who could explain all this; accordingly he appealed to the Chinaman and began to question him, but the worthy dealer knew nothing except that Mademoiselle Sara had sent for him by Bijou, whom he had not recognised at first, since, in his struggle with *Télémaque*, the poor wretch had lost part of a nose flat enough already. He had followed him and found the young lady in the summer-house where he had been twice already, and there she had written the letter which he had just handed to Georges, and which the intelligent messenger had guessed to be addressed to him. She had then given him a piece of gold, and that was all he knew.

Georges however continued to question Miko-Miko, asking him if the girl had

written it in his presence; if she had been alone while writing it; if her face seemed sad or joyful. The girl had written it in his presence; no one else was there; her face denoted entire calmness and complete happiness.

While Georges was proceeding with his inquiry, the gallop of a horse was heard. It brought a messenger in the Governor's livery, who, a moment later, entered the apartment and handed Georges a letter from Lord Murray. This letter was couched in the following terms:

"My dear Travelling Companion,

"I have thought much about you since I saw you last, and think I have arranged your little business rather well. Be good enough to come to me to-day at two o'clock. I shall have, I hope, some good news for you.

"Yours always,

"MURRAY."

These two letters harmonised perfectly with one another. Accordingly, however great the danger for Georges of presenting himself in the town in his present situation, and although prudence whispered to him that to adventure himself at Port-Louis, and especially at the Governor's house, was a foolhardy proceeding, he gave ear only to his pride, which told him that it would be almost an act of cowardice to decline to keep these two appointments, given as they were by the only two persons who had responded, the one, to his love, the other to his friendship. So, turning to the messenger, he ordered him to present his respects to his lordship and tell him that he would be there at the hour agreed upon.

The messenger went off with this reply.

Then Georges sat down and wrote to Sara. Let us look over his shoulder and read the few lines which he wrote:

"Dear Sara,

"In the first place, bless you for your letter! It is the first I have ever received from you, and short as it is, it tells me all I wanted to know, namely, that you have not forgotten me, that you still love me, and that you are mine, as I am yours. I shall be at Lord Murray's at the hour you name. Shall you be there? you do not say. Alas! the only happy news I can expect must come from your mouth alone, since the only happiness in the world to which I aspire is that of being your husband. Hitherto, I have done all I have been able in order

to attain it; all that I shall yet do will have the same aim. Keep brave and true then, Sara, as I shall be brave and true; for, close to us as happiness seems to you to be, I greatly fear that we have both some trying experiences yet to go through before attaining it.

"No matter, Sara; my conviction is that nothing in the world can withstand a powerful and unchanging will, and a deep and devoted love; have this love, Sara, and I will have the will.

"Your Georges."

Having written this letter, Georges gave it to Miko-Miko, who took up his bamboo and his baskets again, and started at his wonted pace for Port-Louis, having received, it goes without saying, the fresh payment which his faithful services so well deserved.

Georges was left alone with Laïza, who had heard almost all, and understood everything.

"You are going to the town?" he asked Georges.

"Yes," replied the latter.

"It is imprudent," replied the Negro.

"I know it, but I must go; and I should be a coward in my own eyes, if I did not go."

"Very well, go then; but if at ten o'clock you have not arrived at the *Rivière des Lataniers* . . ."

"It will be because I am a prisoner or dead: in that event, march upon the town and rescue me, or avenge me."

"Very well," said Laïza, "you may count upon us." And these two men who had such a mutual understanding that one word, one gesture, one clasp of the hand sufficed to make them sure of one another, parted without exchanging one further promise or instruction.

It was now ten o'clock, and Georges was informed that his father was asking for him and would breakfast with him. Georges answered by going into the dining-room; he was as calm as if nothing had happened.

Pierre Munier threw at him a glance in which was depicted all his paternal solicitude; but was reassured by seeing his son's face just the same as usual and perceiving the same smile upon his lips with which he greeted him daily.

"God be praised, my dear boy!" said the good man. "When I saw the messengers succeeding each other so rapidly I was afraid they brought bad news, but

your air of calmness tells me that I was mistaken."

"You are right, father," answered Georges, "all goes well; the revolt is still fixed for this evening at the same hour, and these messengers brought me two letters: one from the Governor, giving me an appointment with him to-day at two o'clock; the other from Sara, who tells me that she loves me."

Pierre Munier remained stunned by surprise.

It was the first time that Georges had spoken to him of the revolt of the blacks and of the Governor's friendship. He had known indirectly of the revolt, and the poor father trembled to the depths of his heart at seeing his dearly-loved child embark on such a road. He stammered some words, but Georges interrupted him.

"Father," said he with a smile, "do you recollect the day when, after having performed prodigies of valour, after having rescued the Volunteers and taken a flag, that flag was seized from you by M. de Malmédie. That day you behaved grandly, nobly, sublimely, in presence of the enemy, as you always will behave, indeed, in presence of danger. That day I swore that some time men and things should be restored to their proper place; the time has arrived, and I will not shrink from my oath. God shall judge between slaves and masters, between weak and strong, between martyrs and executioners, that is all."

Then, as Pierre Munier, without strength, without power, without resistance to such a will, sank down, as though the weight of the world were pressing him under, Georges ordered Ali to saddle the horses, and, after quietly finishing his breakfast, glancing sadly at his father now and then, rose to go out.

Pierre Munier started and stood up, extending his arms towards his son.

Georges went up to him, took his head between his hands, and, with an expression of filial love to which he had never given way before, drew the venerable head close to him, and imprinted five or six kisses in quick succession upon his grey hair.

"My son, my son!" cried Pierre Munier.

"Father," said Georges, "you shall have a respected old age, or I shall have a bloody grave. Farewell!"



Georges hurried from the room, and the old man fell back into his chair with a deep groan.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE REFUSAL

AT about two leagues from his father's house Georges overtook Miko-Miko returning to Port-Louis; he stopped his horse, motioned to the Chinaman to approach him, spoke a few words in his ear, to which Miko-Miko replied by a sign that he understood, and then continued his journey.

When he reached the foot of the *Montagne de la Découverte*, Georges began to meet people coming from the town; he carefully scrutinized the faces of these passers-by, but he did not observe on the various countenances of those whom chance brought across his path any indication that might lead him to think that the project for the revolt which was going to be put into execution by him that evening had in the slightest degree leaked out. He continued his road, passed the cantonments of the Blacks, and entered the town.

All was quiet there; every one appeared to be occupied with his own personal business, and no general anxiety hovered over the population. The ships were rocking peacefully in the shelter of the harbour. The *Pointe aux Blagueurs* was furnished with its customary loungers; an American vessel, just arrived from Calcutta, was casting anchor in front of the *Chien-de-Plomb*.

The appearance of Georges, however, seemed to create a certain excitement, but it was clear that this was connected with the affair of the races and the unheard-of insult offered by a Mulatto to a White. Several groups evidently dropped, on seeing Georges, the subject of conversation that was occupying them, in order to follow him with their eyes and exchange *sotto voce* some words of astonishment at his audacity in appearing in the Town again; but Georges responded to their stares with a look so haughty, and to their whispers with a smile so con-

temptuous, that they lowered their glances, unable to endure the gleam of galling superiority that flashed from his eyes. Besides, the silver-chased butt ends of a pair of double-barrelled pistols could be seen protruding from each of his holsters.

Georges bestowed his chief attention upon the soldiers and officers whom he met on his road. But both soldiers and officers wore the bored expression of persons who had been transported from one part of the world to another and condemned to exile at a distance of four thousand leagues. Certainly, if any of them had the knowledge that Georges was providing employment for them during the night, they looked, if not glad, at least as if they were not at all concerned.

Georges was reassured by these signs.

He arrived in due course at the gate of Government House, threw his horse's bridle into Ali's hands, ordering him not to leave the place. Then he crossed the court-yard, mounted the steps, and entered the ante-chamber.

The servants had been given instructions beforehand to admit M. Georges Munier as soon as he presented himself. A footman accordingly preceded the young man, opened the door of the salon and announced his name, and Georges entered.

In this room were Lord Murray, M. de Malmédie and Sara.

To the great astonishment of Sara, whose eyes had turned to him immediately, the face of Georges expressed a feeling of pain rather than of joy at sight of her; his forehead became slightly wrinkled, his eyebrows contracted, and an almost bitter smile passed over his mouth.

Sara, who had risen quickly, felt her knees give way under her, and sank back slowly into her chair.

M. de Malmédie stood up stiffly, as was his habit, contenting himself with a slight inclination of the head: Lord Murray took two steps towards Georges and gave him his hand.

"My young friend," said he, "I rejoice to tell you some news that will, I hope, crown your desires; namely, that M. de Malmédie, being desirous of putting an end to all these distinctions of colour and all these rivalries of caste which for two hundred years have been the bane, not only of the Isle of France, but of the Colonies in general, M. de Malmédie, I

say, consents to grant you the hand of his niece, Mademoiselle Sara de Malmédie.

Sara blushed and raised her eyes imperceptibly to Georges, but the latter contented himself with bowing without making any reply. M. de Malmédie and Lord Murray looked at one another in astonishment.

"My dear M. de Malmédie," said Lord Murray smiling, "I quite see that our incredulous friend does not trust my unsupported word; tell him then that you grant him the request he has made you, and that you wish all recollection of animosity, past and present, to be forgotten between your two families."

"It is true, sir," said M. de Malmédie, evidently imposing a great effort upon himself, "and the Governor has just acquainted you with my sentiments. If you bear any malice on account of a certain incident which occurred at the taking of Port-Louis, forget it, as I promise you in my son's name that he will forget the grave insult which you offered him quite lately. As for your union with my niece, his Excellency the Governor has told you that I give my consent to it, and, unless to-day it should be you who decline——"

"Oh, Georges!" cried Sara carried away by her emotion.

"Do not judge me hastily by my answer, Sara," replied the young man, "for that answer is, I assure you, dictated by an imperious necessity. Sara, since the evening in the summer house, since the night of the ball, since the day when I saw you for the first time, you have been my wife in the sight of God and man. No other than yourself will ever bear a name which you have not despised in spite of its humbleness; all that I am about to say then is merely a question of form and of time."

Georges turned to the Governor.

"Thank you, my Lord," he continued, "thank you; I acknowledge, in what is happening to-day, the support of your generous philanthropy and of your kind friendship. But, on the day when M. de Malmédie refused me his niece, when M. Henri insulted me for the second time, and I thought it my duty to avenge that refusal and that insult by insulting him publicly and ignominiously, on that day I broke with the Whites, and there is no reconciliation possible between us. M. de Malmédie, influenced by some calcu-

lation, some intention which I do not understand, may be ready to meet me half-way, but I will not advance the other half. If Mademoiselle Sara loves me, she is free, is mistress of her hand and her fortune; it is for her to show herself more noble still in my eyes by descending to my level, and not for me to lower myself in her eyes by trying to climb to hers."

"Oh, Monsieur Georges!" cried Sara, "you know quite well——"

"Yes, I know," said Georges, "that you are a noble girl, that you have a devoted heart, a pure soul. I know that you will come to me, Sara, spite of all obstacles, all hindrances, all prejudices. I know that I have only to wait for you and that I shall see you appear one day, and for just this reason, that, the sacrifice being on your side, you have already decided in your generous heart that you will make this sacrifice for me. But for you, M. de Malmédie, for your son M. Henri, who agrees to decline to fight with me on condition that he shall have me whipped by his friends, oh! between us it is war to the death, do you understand? it is a mortal hatred that can only be ended on my part by his death or his humiliation; let your son make his choice then."

"Your Excellency," answered M. de Malmédie with more dignity than might have been expected from him, "you see that I, for my part, have done what I could; I have sacrificed my pride, I have forgotten the old insult as well as the recent one, but I cannot reasonably be expected to do more, and I must abide by the declaration of war which this gentleman has made against me. Only, we shall act on the defensive while awaiting his attack. Now, Mademoiselle," continued M. de Malmédie turning to Sara, "you are free in regard to your heart, your hand, and your fortune. Act then as you wish; stay with this gentleman, or follow me."

"Uncle," said Sara, "it is my duty to go with you. Farewell, Georges! I do not understand at all what you have done to-day; but I am certain that you have acted as you ought to have acted."

And, bowing with quiet dignity to the Governor, Sara went out with M. de Malmédie.

Lord Murray accompanied them to the door and went out with them, returning a moment afterwards.



His look of inquiry met the steadfast glance of Georges, and a short silence ensued between the two men who, thanks to their lofty nature, understood each other so well.

"So," said the Governor, "you have refused."

"I thought it my duty to act thus, my Lord."

"Forgive me if I appear to question you; but may I know what sentiment has prompted your refusal?"

"The sentiment of my own dignity."

"That is the only one?"

"If there be another, my Lord, allow me to keep it a secret."

"Listen, Georges," said the Governor, with a degree of unconstraint which was all the more charming in him, as you felt it to be quite foreign to his cold and placid disposition, "listen! From the moment when I met you on board the Leicester and was able to appreciate the high qualities that distinguish you, my desire was to make you act as a bond which should unite the two opposed castes in this Island. I began by discovering your sentiments, then you made me the confidant of your love, and I agreed to the request which you made to me that I would be your intermediary, your sponsor, your second. For that, Georges," resumed Lord Murray in response to an inclination of the head from Georges, "for that, my young friend, you owe no thanks; you were yourself anticipating my wishes, you were supporting my scheme of conciliation, you were making the path easy for my political projects. I therefore went with you to M. de Malmédie's and backed up your request with all the authority of my presence and all the weight of my name."

"I know, my Lord, and I thank you. But you saw for yourself that neither the weight of your name, honourable as it is, nor the authority of your presence, flattering as it must have been, were able to spare me a refusal."

"I felt it as much as you did, Georges. I admired your calm behaviour, and I understood from your coolness that you were planning a terrible revenge. That revenge you took publicly, on the day of the races, and on that day it was borne in upon me once more that I must in all probability abandon my schemes of conciliation."

"I had warned you, my Lord, when I left you."

"Yes, I know, but listen to me: I did not regard myself even then as defeated: yesterday I went to M. de Malmédie, and by dint of prayers and entreaties, by dint of almost abusing the influence which my position gives me, I obtained from the father a promise that he would forget his old hatred against your father; from the son, that he would forget his recent hatred against you; and from both, that they would consent to your marriage with Mademoiselle de Malmédie."

"Sara is free, my Lord," interrupted Georges vehemently, "and, thank God, requires the consent of nobody for becoming my wife."

"Yes, I admit it," replied the Governor, "but what a difference, I put it to you, in the eyes of the world, between carrying off a girl clandestinely from her guardian's house, and receiving her publicly from the hands of her family! Consult your pride, M. Munier, and see if I have not secured for it a supreme satisfaction—a triumph which even your pride did not anticipate."

"It is true," answered Georges. "Unhappily this consent comes too late."

"Too late! too late for what?" replied the Governor.

"Excuse me from answering you on that point, my Lord. It is my secret."

"Your secret, poor fellow! Well, would you like that I should tell you this secret which you are unwilling to disclose?"

Georges looked at the Governor with a smile of incredulity.

"Your secret, indeed!" continued the Governor, "a well-guarded secret certainly, that is confided to ten thousand persons."

Georges looked again at the Governor, but this time without smiling.

"Listen to me," resumed the Governor, "you wished to ruin yourself, I wanted to save you. I went and found Sara's uncle, I took him apart and said to him: 'You have under-rated M. Georges Munier, you have repulsed him with insolence, you have forced him to break openly with you, and you were wrong in so doing. For M. Georges Munier is a distinguished man, of lofty mind, and noble soul; there was something to be made of such qualifications as he possesses, and, in proof of this, I tell you that M. Georges Munier holds all our lives in his hand at the present moment; he is the leader of a vast conspiracy; at ten o'clock to-morrow evening (it was yesterday that I

was speaking to him) M. Georges Munier will march upon Port-Louis at the head of ten thousand Negroes, and, as we have only eighteen hundred soldiers, we shall all be lost unless chance should suggest to me some plan for safety, such as sometimes occurs to men of genius. In short, the day after to-morrow M. Georges Munier, whom at this moment you look down upon as descended from a herd of slaves, will perhaps be our master, and perhaps will choose to have you in his turn as a slave. Well, sir,' I said to him, 'you can prevent all this, you can save the Colony; forgive the past, grant M. Georges your niece's hand which you refused him, and, if he accepts, if he consents to accept, I ought to say, for, the parts being changed, the claims may be changed also, well, then you will have saved not only your own life, your liberty and your fortune, but also the lives, liberties, and fortunes of us all.' That is what I said to him; and then, at my prayers, my entreaties, nay, my orders, he consented. But what I had foreseen has happened; you had pledged yourself too soon, and you are not able to withdraw."

Georges had followed the Governor's words with ever increasing astonishment, yet with perfect calmness.

"Then you know all, my Lord," he said when the other had finished.

"I think you must see that I do, and I believe I have forgotten nothing."

"No," answered Georges, smiling, "no, your spies are well informed, and I compliment you on the manner in which your police are organised."

"Well, then," said the Governor, "now that you know the motive which caused my action, there is still time; accept Sara's hand, be reconciled with her family, abandon your mad scheme, and I will know nothing, I will ignore everything, forget everything."

"Impossible!" said Georges.

"Reflect then on the kind of men to whom you have bound yourself."

"You forget, my Lord, that these men, of whom you speak with such contempt, are my brothers. They have recognised me, who am despised by the Whites as their inferior, as their Chief. You forget that when these men handed over their lives into my keeping, I consecrated my life to them."

"You refuse then?"

"I refuse."

"In spite of my entreaties?"

"Pardon me, my Lord, but I cannot listen to them."

"In spite of your love for Sara and her love for you?"

"In spite of everything."

"Reflect once more."

"It is useless, my mind is made up."

"Very good . . . Now, sir," said Lord Murray, "one final question."

"Put it."

"If I were in your place, and you were in mine, what would you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Yes; if I were Georges Munier, leader of a revolt, and you Lord Murray, Governor of the Isle of France; if you had me in your power as I hold you in mine, tell me, I ask you for the second time, what you would do?"

"What should I do, my Lord? I should allow the man to go out from here who came on your own invitation, believing he was summoned to an interview, and not being dragged into an ambuscade. Then, in the evening, if I had faith in the justice of my cause, I should appeal to God, that He might decide between us."

"Well, you would be wrong, Georges; for, the moment I drew the sword you would be unable to save me. The moment I had kindled the revolt, I should have to quench it with my blood. . . No, Georges, I don't want a man like yourself to die upon the scaffold, do you understand? to die like a vulgar rebel, whose intentions will be calumniated, and whose name will be blasted. So, in order to save you from such a misfortune, to snatch you from your fate, you are my prisoner, sir; I arrest you!"

"My Lord!" cried Georges, looking round him for some weapon which he might seize and defend himself with.

"Men," said the Governor, raising his voice, "enter and seize this man."

Four soldiers, headed by a corporal, entered and surrounded Georges.

"Conduct this gentleman to the Police Station," said the Governor; "put him in the room which I made ready this morning; and, while keeping a strict guard over him, take care that neither you nor any one else fail in the respect which is due to him."

With these words, the Governor saluted Georges, and Georges quitted the apartment.



## CHAPTER XXII

## THE REVOLT

ALL that had just taken place had occurred so rapidly and in a manner so unforeseen that Georges had had no time to prepare himself for what had befallen him. But, thanks to his wonderful power of self-control, he concealed beneath an impassive and perpetual smile of careless disdain the various emotions by which he was assailed.

The prisoner and his guards went out by a door at the back of the house at which the Governor's carriage was waiting; and, either by accident or by intention, Miko-Miko was passing just in front of this door at the very moment when Georges was getting into the carriage. The young man and his usual messenger exchanged glances.

Georges was conducted in accordance with the Governor's orders to the Police Station, a large building the name of which indicates its use, situated in the *Rue du Gouvernement*, a little below the Comedy Theatre. Georges was taken to the room mentioned by the Governor.

This room had evidently been prepared beforehand, as Lord Murray had said, and it was even clear that there had been the intention to make it as comfortable as possible. It was neatly furnished and the bed was almost elegant; nothing in the room suggested a prison, except that its windows were barred.

When the door had closed on Georges and the prisoner found himself alone, he went at once to the window, which was about twenty feet from the ground and looked out on the Hôtel Coignet. One of the windows of the hotel was just opposite the room occupied by Georges, so that the prisoner could see into the lower part of the room, and all the more easily because this window stood open. Georges went back from the window to the door, listened, and heard the guard being mounted in the corridor. Then he went back to the window and opened it. No sentry had been placed in the street, the bars being relied on for preventing the prisoner's escape, and, in point of fact, the bars were so thick as to render such a precaution superfluous. He had therefore no hope of escaping unless he received some help from outside.

But Georges was doubtless expecting

this help from outside, for, leaving his window open, he remained with his eyes constantly fixed on the Hôtel Coignet, which, as we have said, rises opposite the Police Station. In point of fact, his hopes were not disappointed; after waiting for an hour he saw Miko-Miko, with his bamboo rod on his shoulder, cross the room opposite to his own, conducted by one of the servants of the house. Georges and he exchanged but one glance; but this look, rapid as it was, restored calmness to Georges' brow.

From that moment Georges appeared almost as much at ease as if he had been in his own room at Moka; from time to time, however, an attentive observer might have noticed that he knit his brows and passed his hand across his forehead. Beneath this apparent calmness a host of reflections were surging in his mind, and, like a rising tide, beating upon his brain with their ebb and flow.

However, the hours passed by without bringing to the prisoner any indication that preparations were being made in the town. Neither roll of drum nor clash of arms was heard. Georges ran to the window two or three times, deceived by a noise resembling the roll of drums; but each time he saw that he was mistaken, and that the sound which he had mistaken for drums was the noise made by waggons loaded with barrels passing along the streets.

Night was coming on, and Georges, becoming more disturbed and uneasy with its advance, kept going from the door to the window and back again with a feverish movement which he made the less effort to suppress since he was alone; the door remained guarded by the sentinel, while the window remained unguarded except for its bars.

Occasionally Georges placed his hand over his breast, and a slight contraction of his features showed that he was feeling one of those momentary spasms which the bravest of men cannot overcome in critical circumstances. Doubtless he was thinking at such moments of his father, who was ignorant of his peril, and of Sara, who all unknowingly had brought him into this danger. As for the Governor, though Georges maintained against him that cold and concentrated rage which a gambler who has lost feels towards his antagonist, he could not disguise from himself that, on this occasion,

he had displayed towards him not only all that gentlemanly conduct which was characteristic of him, but further that he had not arrested him until he had offered him all the means of escape which were in his power. All this, however, had not prevented Georges from being committed on a charge of high treason.

Meanwhile the darkness was increasing. Georges looked at his watch, and saw that it was half-past eight; in an hour and a half the revolt would break out.

Suddenly Georges raised his head and fixed his eyes once more on the Hôtel Coignet, where he had seen a shadow moving in the room opposite his own. The shadowy figure made him a sign; Georges moved from the window, and a parcel was thrown across the street through the bars and fell into the middle of the room.

Georges ran forward and picked up the parcel, which contained a rope and a file; this was the help from outside that Georges was expecting.

Georges held his liberty between his hands; but it was only in order to encounter the hour of danger that he wished to be at liberty.

He concealed the rope beneath his mattress, and, as it was now quite dark, began to file one of the bars. These bars were sufficiently wide apart from one another to enable him to creep through the opening, if one of them were removed.

It was a muffled file, which made scarcely any noise, and, as his supper had been brought to him at seven o'clock, Georges felt almost certain that he would not be disturbed.

However, the work progressed slowly. Nine o'clock, half-past nine, ten, sounded. For some time the prisoner while sawing at the iron bar had thought he saw bright lights shining towards the end of the *Rue du Gouvernement* in the direction of the *Rue de la Comédie* and the harbour. But not a single patrol made its way through the Town, not a single belated soldier was going back to barracks. Georges could not understand this indifference on the Governor's part; he knew him too well not to be sure that he had taken all his precautions, and yet, as we have said, the Town appeared quite undefended, and as though abandoned to itself.

At ten o'clock, however, he thought he heard sounds gradually increasing in

volume proceeding from the direction of the Malabar cantonment, the direction from which, as you will remember, the slaves, after mustering on the banks of the *Rivière des Lataniers*, would arrive. Georges redoubled his efforts; the bar was already completely sawn through at the bottom, and he had just begun upon the top.

The noise continued to increase. There was no room for mistake; it was the sound caused by the mingled voices of several thousands of men. Laïza had kept his word. A smile of joy passed over Georges' lips, a flash of pride lit up his brow; there was to be fighting; not victory, perhaps, but, at least, a struggle. And Georges would be in the thick of it, for the bar now held only by a thread.

So he listened with eager ears and palpitating heart; the sounds came nearer and nearer, while the light which he had already noticed grew brighter. Was there a fire at Port-Louis? That could hardly be, for no cry of alarm had been heard.

Georges waited another quarter of an hour, hoping that his anxiety would be relieved by hearing the sound of firing, which would tell him that the work was beginning; but the same strange noise which he had heard previously continued, yet without being intermingled with the noise which he was expecting to hear.

The prisoner then thought that the important thing for him was to make his escape at once. Georges gave the bar a final wrench, and it yielded. He next tied the rope firmly to its support, threw the bar out to serve as a weapon, let himself slide down the rope, reached the ground safely, picked up the bar, and rushed down one of the side streets. The nearer Georges drew to the *Rue de Paris*, which crosses all the northern quarter of the Town, the brighter grew the light and the louder the noise; at last he reached the corner of a brilliantly illuminated street, and everything was at once explained to him.

All the streets that led to the Malabar cantonment, and by which the revolted slaves would enter the Town, were illuminated as if for a fête, and at different spots in front of the principal houses had been placed casks of arrack, brandy, and rum, with their heads staved in, as if for distribution gratis.



The Negroes had rushed like a torrent upon Port-Louis, uttering cries of rage and vengeance. But they arrived to find the streets illuminated, and had seen these tempting barrels. For an instant the orders of Laïza, and the thought that all these barrels might be poisoned, restrained them; but soon their natural craving got the better of their discipline and even of their fears. Some of them fell out of the ranks and began to drink. On hearing their shouts of delight, the other Negroes were unable to keep their ranks, and all this great multitude, sufficient to annihilate Port-Louis, was split up and scattered in a moment, crowding round the casks with shouts of joyous infatuation, drinking in handfuls rum, brandy, and arrack, the everlasting poison of the black races, the sight of which no Negro can resist, in exchange for which he sells his children, his father and mother, and often ends by selling himself.

Hence those shouts of strange import which Georges had not been able to explain. The Governor had put into practice the advice given by Jacques himself, and it had turned out only too well. The revolted slaves had entered Port-Louis, but their rage had cooled down before they were well across the quarter of the Town extending from the *Petite-Montagne* to the *Trou-Fanfaron*, and had expired at a hundred yards from Government House.

At the sight of the strange spectacle which unfolded itself before his eyes, Georges retained no further doubt as to the result of his enterprise, he remembered what Jacques had predicted, and shuddered with anger and shame. These men by whose aid he had reckoned on making a revolution which would overthrow the Island and avenge two centuries of slavery by an hour of victory and a future of liberty,—these men were laughing, singing, dancing, defenceless, intoxicated, staggering; these men three hundred soldiers armed with whips might now drive them back to work; and these men numbered ten thousand!

So all this long toil which Georges had imposed upon himself was thrown away; all this lofty study of his own mind, his own strength, his own worth, was useless; all this God-given superiority of character, of education at the expense of others, all this was crushed in face of the instincts of a race that preferred brandy to liberty.

Georges realised at once the worthlessness of his ambitions; his pride had carried him for a moment to the top of a mountain, and had shown him all the kingdoms of the earth at his feet; then all had disappeared,—it was but a dream. And Georges found himself back at the same spot where his delusive pride had seized him.

He grasped his iron bar between his hands; he felt himself smitten with a fierce longing to hurl himself into the midst of all these wretches and to smash all these besotted heads that had not had the strength to resist the coarse temptation for which he would have to suffer.

Some groups of curious onlookers, no doubt puzzled at this extempore fête which the Governor was giving to the slaves, stood staring at the proceedings with open mouths. Every one asked his neighbour what it all meant, only to find that his neighbour, as ignorant as himself, could not give him the slightest explanation.

Georges rushed from group to group, searching with his eyes these long streets, illuminated and filled with drunken Negroes uttering frantic cries. He was looking amid all this crowd of filthy creatures for a man, the one man on whom he still relied among this general degradation. This man was Laïza.

Suddenly, Georges heard a loud noise proceeding from the direction of the Police Station, then a brisk firing began, on the one side with the precision customary to regular troops, on the other with that spasmodic fitfulness which accompanies the firing of volunteers.

So, at last, there was a spot where fighting was taking place.

Georges dashed off in that direction, and in five minutes was in the *Rue du Gouvernement*. He was not mistaken. This small band who were fighting were led by Laïza, who, having learnt that Georges was a prisoner, had gone round the Town with four hundred picked men, and had marched on the Police Station to rescue him.

This action had doubtless been foreseen, for, immediately on seeing the little band of revolted slaves appear at the end of the street, an English battalion had moved off to oppose them.

Laïza had hardly hoped to be allowed to rescue Georges without a fight, but he had reckoned on the diversion that would



THE ESCAPE





be caused by the rest of the Negroes arriving by the streets adjacent to the Malabar cantonment; unfortunately, as we have seen, this diversion had failed him from the cause which we have related.

Georges took one leap into the midst of the combatants, shouting loudly, "Laïza! Laïza!" He had found one Negro worthy of the name of man; he had found a nature equal to his own.

The two leaders met under fire, and, without seeking cover, and regardless of the bullets whistling round them, exchanged a few short hurried words such as a crisis demands. In an instant Laïza had been told the whole situation; he shook his head, and merely observed:

"All is lost."

Georges wished to give him some hope, urged him to try some efforts with the drinkers; but Laïza replied, with a smile of profound contempt:

"Bah! They are on the drink; and, unless the brandy runs short, there is no hope left!"

But the barrels had been broached in too great quantities for the brandy to run short.

The struggle was now useless so far as regards the object with which it had been begun, since Georges, whom Laïza had come to rescue, was free; it only remained then to regret the loss of the dozen or so of men who had already been disabled, and to give the signal for a retreat. But retreat by the *Rue du Gouvernement* had become an impossibility; for while Laïza's troop faced the English battalion which had opposed its attempt on the Police-Station, another detachment issued with drums beating from the powder-magazine, where it had been lying in wait, and blocked the road by which Laïza with his men had arrived. They were obliged therefore to make for the streets surrounding the Law Courts and thus regain the neighbourhood of the *Petite-Montagne* and the Malabar cantonments.

Georges and Laïza with their men had scarcely gone two hundred yards when they found themselves in the illuminated streets where the barrels were. The scene was even more disgusting than before; the drunkenness had made good progress.

Then, at the end of each street, could be seen flashing through the darkness the bayonets of an English company. Georges and Laïza looked at one another with a smile that implied:

"It is not a question here of conquering, but of dying and dying bravely."

Both, however, wished to make a final effort, and rushed into the principal street, trying to rally some of the rebels to their small body. But some of these were hardly in a condition to listen to the appeals and exhortations of their chiefs, while others ignored them entirely, shouting with drunken voices and dancing with staggering limbs; while the greater number, now in the last stage of intoxication, were rolling in the street, losing more and more every minute the little sense that remained to them. Laïza had snatched up a whip and was belabouring the wretches with all his strength; Georges, leaning on his iron bar, the only weapon which he had touched, stood looking at them motionless and contemptuous, like a statue of Disdain.

After a few minutes, both were convinced that there was nothing to hope for, and that each moment that they stayed there was a year cut off from their life; besides, some men in their own band, led away by force of example, fascinated by the sight of the intoxicating liquor, and made giddy by the alcoholic odour which mounted to their brain, began in their turn to desert them. There was then no time to be lost in leaving the town; indeed it was evident that they had lost too much time already.

Georges and Laïza collected the little band which still remained faithful to them, and which consisted of about three hundred men; then, placing themselves at their head, they marched resolutely towards the end of the street, which, as we have said, was blocked by a wall of soldiers. When within forty yards of the English, they saw their rifles lowered at them, a gleam of flame burst along the whole line and immediately a hail of bullets swept their ranks; ten or twelve men fell, but the two leaders remained unhurt, and the cry of "Forward!" uttered simultaneously by their two powerful voices, resounded through the air.

When they came within twenty yards, the fire of the rear rank followed that of the first, causing still greater havoc among the rebels. Then, almost immediately, the two forces met, and a hand-to-hand combat ensued.

The fray was terrible; all the world knows what English troops are like, and how they die at their posts. But, on the



other hand, they had to deal with desperate men, who knew that, if taken prisoners, an ignominious death awaited them, and who, consequently, wished to die as free men.

Georges and Laïza performed miracles of boldness and courage: Laïza, with his rifle, which he had grasped by the stock and employed as a flail; Georges, with the bar which he had wrenched from his window and used as all weapons combined. Their men, too, supported them excellently, rushing on the English with bayonet thrusts, while the wounded dragged themselves between the combatants, and, crawling up to the enemy, cut their ham-strings with their knives.

Thus for ten minutes the struggle lasted, furious, desperate, and deadly, no one being able to say which side would gain the advantage. Despair, however, triumphed over discipline; the English ranks opened like a bursting dam and let through the torrent, which at once overflowed beyond the town.

Georges and Laïza who had headed the attack now remained in the rear to support the retreat. At last, they reached the foot of the *Petite Montagne*, which was a place too precipitous and too thickly timbered for the English to venture to enter. Accordingly they halted, while the Negroes, on their side, paused to regain their breath. Some twenty blacks rallied round their leaders; the rest scattered in all directions; it was no longer a question of fighting, but of seeking safety in the great woods. Georges appointed the district of Moka, in which his father's house was situated, as the general meeting-place for those who wished to rally round him, announcing that he would start in the morning at dawn in order to reach the district of Grand-Port, in which, as we have said, were the thickest forests.

Georges was giving his final instructions to the miserable remnants of the force with which he had for an instant hoped to conquer the Island, and the moon, gliding momentarily across the space between two clouds, shed her light upon the group of men whom he commanded, if not with the sword, at least by word and gesture, when suddenly a thicket, distant about forty yards from the fugitives, burst into flame; the report of a rifle was heard, and Georges fell at Laïza's feet struck by a bullet in his side.

At the same moment a man, whose rapid flight could be detected for a moment in the shadow, sprang from the still smoking thicket into a ravine extending behind him, and, hidden from all eyes, followed it down its length, regaining by a circuitous route the ranks of the English soldiers, who had halted on the banks of the *Ruisseau des Pucelles*.

But, swift as had been the flight of the assassin, Laïza had recognised him, and, before he quite lost consciousness, the wounded man heard these three words muttered, to the accompaniment of a calm but implacable gesture:

"Antonio the Malay!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A FATHER'S HEART

WHILE the various events which we have just related were taking place at Port-Louis Pierre Munier was anxiously awaiting at Moka the dreaded result of the enterprise of which his son had given him a hint.

Accustomed, as we have said, to the everlasting supremacy of the Whites, he had come to regard it not merely as an acquired right, but as a natural superiority. However great the confidence with which his son had inspired him, he could not then believe that these obstacles, which he regarded as insurmountable, would be removed from his path.

From the moment when, as has been described, Georges took leave of him, he had sunk into a profound apathy; the very excess of the emotions which crowded his heart, and the diversity of the thoughts which clashed in his mind, had thrown him into an apparent state of insensibility almost amounting to imbecility. More than once he very nearly made up his mind to go himself to Port-Louis, and see with his own eyes what was going on; but to go and encounter a certainty required a strength of will which the poor father did not possess; had it only been a question of preventing a danger, Pierre Munier would have run there.

The day was spent then in an anguish all the more profound because it was con-

finéd within his own breast, and that the man who suffered it did not dare to tell any one, not even Télémaque, the cause of the dejection about which the latter questioned him. From time to time he rose from his arm-chair and went with bowed head to the open window, looked in the direction of the Town as though he could see, listened as though he could hear; then, neither seeing nor hearing anything, he sighed and went back with dumb lips and lack lustre eyes and sat down in his chair again.

The dinner hour arrived. Télémaque, who was entrusted with the ordinary duties of the household, laid the cloth, set the table, and brought in the dinner; but all these various occupations were completed, and meanwhile the man for whom the preparations were being made had not even raised his eyes. Then, when all was ready, Télémaque waited for a quarter of an hour, after which, seeing that his master remained in the same condition of stupor, he touched him lightly on the shoulder. Pierre Munier started, and getting up quickly, asked:

"Well, has anything been heard?"

Télémaque indicated to his master that dinner was served; but Pierre Munier smiled sadly, shook his head and relapsed into his reverie. The Negro perceived that something unusual was happening, and, without venturing to ask for an explanation, rolled the whites of his eyes round, as though to look for some sign that might put him on the track of this unknown event. Everything was in its customary place, and all was going on as usual; nevertheless it was evident that the expectation of some great misfortune had come to brood that morning over the domestic hearth.

The day passed in this manner.

Télémaque, still hoping that hunger would assert its rights, left the dinner on the table; but Pierre Munier was too profoundly absorbed to interest himself in anything except his own thoughts. However, there was a moment when Télémaque, seeing great drops of perspiration standing on his master's forehead, thought he was feeling the heat, and offered him a glass of wine and water; but Pierre Munier pushed the glass gently aside, saying:

"You have heard nothing yet?"

Télémaque shook his head, looked in turns at the floor and ceiling, as if to ask

each of them alternately if they were any better informed than himself. Then, seeing that each of them remained dumb, he went out to ask the Negroes if they possessed any more knowledge than he did as to the unknown cause of his master's secret uneasiness.

But, to his great astonishment, he found that there was not a single Negro about the house. He ran at once to the barn where they were in the habit of assembling for the *berloque*. The barn was deserted, so he returned by the huts, but found not a soul in them except the women and children.

On questioning these he learned that the Negroes, as soon as the day's work was over, instead of taking their rest as usual, had armed themselves and gone off in separate bands, but all making in the direction of the *Rivière des Lataniers*. On hearing this, he returned to the house.

Aroused by the sound of the opening door, the old man turned round.

"Well?" he asked.

Then Télémaque told him of the absence of the Negroes, and how they had all gone off armed in the same direction.

"Yes, yes!" said Pierre Munier, "yes, alas!"

There was then no room for doubt, and this information concurred in making the poor father believe that the moment had come when what happened in the Town would decide his whole fate. I say, *his* fate, for, since the return of Georges, the old man, seeing his son so handsome and so brave, so confident of himself, so rich in the experience of the past, so sure of the future, had so identified his own life with that of his son that he had come to feel convinced that their existence was inseparable, and that he should never be able to endure the loss of his son, or even his absence.

How severely did he reproach himself for having let Georges go away that morning without questioning him, without learning to what dangers he was about to expose himself! How did he upbraid himself for not having insisted on accompanying him!

But the mere idea that his son was about to enter upon an overt struggle against the Whites had so utterly prostrated him that he had felt all his moral force desert him on the spot. This



simple soul was so constituted, as we have said, that it had no strength except in the presence of dangers that were physical.

Night, however, had come, and the hours went by without bringing any news, either consoling or the reverse. Although the darkness which prevailed outside, rendered even more profound by the light shining in the room, prevented him from distinguishing any object at the distance of ten yards, Pierre Munier continued to move, at intervals almost regular, but gradually diminishing in length, from his chair to the window and back from the window to his chair. T  l  maque, now extremely uneasy, had installed himself in the same room; but, devoted as this faithful servant was, he could not keep awake, and was sleeping on a chair with his head against the wall, against which his profile stood out like a drawing in charcoal.

At two in the morning, a watch-dog, which was usually allowed to run loose about the house during the night, but which had been left chained up that evening owing to the general pre-occupation, uttered a low and plaintive howl. Pierre Munier started and got up; but at the sound of that mournful whine which the superstition of the Blacks regards as the sure announcement of an approaching misfortune, his strength failed him, and he was obliged to lean against the table to save himself from falling. Five minutes later, the dog gave another howl, louder, more melancholy and more prolonged than the first; then, after a similar interval, a third, even more funereal and piteous than the other two.

Pierre Munier, pale and voiceless, the perspiration standing on his brow, remained with his eyes fixed upon the door without moving towards it, like a man expecting some misfortune which he knows will enter that way.

After an instant was heard the tread of a number of men, and the steps approached the house with slow and measured pace. They seemed to the poor father like those of men following a funeral procession.

The outer chamber soon seemed to fill with people, but this crowd, whatever it was, maintained silence. Amid the silence, however, the old man heard a groan, and in this groan he seemed to recognise the voice of his son.

"Georges!" he cried! "Georges! in

the name of heaven, is it you? Answer, speak, come here!"

"Here I am, father," answered a weak, but calm, voice; "here I am!"

At that instant the door opened and Georges entered, but leaning against the framework of the door, and so pale that Pierre Munier thought for a moment that it was his son's ghost which had appeared in answer to his summons; so that, instead of going towards Georges, the old man stepped backwards.

"In heaven's name," he murmured, "what has happened to you?"

"I am severely wounded, father, but do not be alarmed, the wound is not mortal, for, as you see, I am standing up and walking; but I cannot keep up for long." Then he added under his breath:

"Help, La  za, my strength is going!"

And he fell into the Negro's arms. Pierre Munier rushed towards his son, but Georges had already fainted.

With that strength of will which had become the distinctive feature of his character, Georges had determined, weak and almost dying as he was, to let his father see him standing up. And this time his action was not the result of that pride which so often exhibited itself in him, but knowing the deep affection which his father bore for him, he feared lest the shock which he might receive from seeing him lying down might prove fatal to him. Accordingly, in spite of the remonstrances of La  za, he had quitted the litter on which the Negroes had carried him in relays across the defiles of the *Montagne du Pouce*, and with superhuman courage, and that strength of will which asserted itself even over physical weakness, he had got up, clung to the wall, and, as he had decided what he would do, had appeared to his father standing upright on his feet.

And, as he had foreseen, the shock had in this way proved less violent to the old man.

Nevertheless his iron will now succumbed beneath the pain, and Georges, exhausted by his supreme effort, fell fainting into La  za's arms.

The father's grief was terrible to witness, even for strong men,—a grief tearless and uncomplaining, mute and profoundly mournful. Georges was laid on a sofa. The old man knelt in front of him, passed his arm beneath his son's head, and waited with his eyes fixed on the closed eyes of the other, holding his

breath as the other's was suspended, grasping with his other hand the hand of the wounded man, asking no questions, not anxious for details, nor inquiring how the result had come about. He knew everything he cared to know: for there was his son, wounded, bleeding, and unconscious; what more did he require to learn, and what to him mattered the cause in face of this terrible result?

Laïza stood erect at a corner of the sideboard, resting on his gun and looking from time to time in the direction of the window to see if it were not yet daylight.

The other Negroes, who had withdrawn respectfully after laying Georges upon the sofa, remained in the next room, occasionally putting their black heads through the doorway, while others were grouped outside in front of the window. Many of them had been wounded more or less dangerously, but no one seemed to think of his own wound.

Every instant their number increased, for all the fugitives, after having first separated in order to avoid pursuit by the English, had regained the dwelling by different roads, just as sheep that have been scattered find their way back one by one to their enclosure. At four in the morning there were about two hundred Negroes round the house.

Meanwhile Georges had recovered consciousness, and had tried to reassure his father by speaking a few words, but in a voice so faint that, though the old man's delight on hearing him speak was great, he signed to him to be silent. He had however inquired what was the nature of the wound, and what surgeon had dressed it, and Georges with a smile and a feeble motion of the head had pointed to Laïza.

It is well known that, in the Colonies, some of the Negroes have the reputation of being skilful in surgery, and that sometimes even the white Colonists send for them in preference to the regular professors of the art. The explanation is quite simple; these primitive creatures, like our own shepherds who often possess remedies of their own to hold their ground against the cleverest doctors, being continually in the presence of Nature, surprise, as do the animals, some of those secrets which remain hidden from the eyes of other men. Now, Laïza had a reputation throughout the Island as a clever surgeon; the Negroes attributed his

knowledge to the use of certain mystic words and magic enchantments, while the Whites ascribed it to his acquaintance with sundry plants and herbs of which he alone knew the names and properties. Accordingly, Pierre Munier felt more easy when he learned that it was Laïza who had dressed his son's wound. Daybreak was now approaching, and as the time went on, Laïza appeared to grow more and more uneasy. At last he could contain himself no longer, and, under pretence of feeling the sick man's pulse, went over to him and spoke to him in a low voice.

"What are you asking and what do you want, my friend?" asked Pierre Munier.

"I shall have to tell you, father, what he wants; he does not wish me to fall into the hands of the Whites, and he is asking me if I feel strong enough to be carried into the great woods."

"Carried into the great woods!" cried the old man; "in your weak condition! impossible!"

"There is nothing else, however, to be done, father, unless you prefer to see me arrested under your eyes and—"

"And what?" asked Pierre Munier anxiously; "what do they want and what can they do to you?"

"What do they want, father? To be avenged on a wretched Mulatto who has had the insolence to stand up against them, and has possibly made them shake in their shoes for an instant. What can they do to me? Oh! a mere trifle," added Georges with a smile, "just slice my head off on the *Plaine Verte*."

The old man turned pale, then shuddered from head to foot, and it was evident that a terrible struggle was going on within him. At last, he raised his forehead, shook his head, and looking at the wounded man murmured:

"Take you! cut off your head! take my child from me! kill him! my Georges! and all because he is handsomer, braver and cleverer than they are—Ah! let them come then! Let them come!"

And the old man, with an energy of which, five minutes before, you would have thought him incapable, rushed towards his carbine which was hanging on the wall, and, seizing the weapon that had lain idle for sixteen years, cried out:

"Yes, yes, let them come and we will see. Ah! you Whites, you have robbed



this poor Mulatto of everything ; you have robbed him of respect, and he said nothing ; you might have taken his life, and he would still have said nothing. But now you want to take his son ; you want to take his child and imprison him, torture him, cut off his head ! Oh ! come, you Whites, and we shall see ! There are fifty years of hatred between us ; come, come, it is time we should settle our accounts."

"Bravo, father, bravo !" cried Georges, raising himself on his elbow and looking at the old man with a feverish glance ; "bravo ! that's more like your old self."

"Well, yes, to the great woods then," said Pierre, "and we shall see if they dare follow us there. Yes, my son, come ; the great woods are better than the towns. There we are under the eyes of God ; let God look down and judge. And you, children," continued the Mulatto, addressing the Negroes, "have you always found me a good master ?"

"Yes, yes !" cried all the Negroes with one voice.

"Have you told me a hundred times that you were devoted to me, not as slaves, but as children."

"Yes, yes !"

"Well then, now is the time you must prove your devotion."

"Give your orders, master, give your orders," cried all the Negroes.

"Come in, all of you."

The room was filled with Blacks.

"Here," continued the old man, "here is my son, who wished to save you, to set you free, to make men of you, and see his reward. And that is not all, they want to come and take him from me, wounded, bleeding and in pain. Will you protect him, will you save him ? Will you die for him and with him ?"

"Yes, yes, yes !" cried all the voices.

"To the great woods then, to the great woods !" said the old man.

"To the great woods !" shouted all the Negroes.

Then they brought the litter of branches to the side of the sofa on which Georges was lying, and placed the wounded man upon it, while four Negroes took hold of the four handles. Georges was carried out of the house accompanied by Laïza, and took the head of the procession ; then followed all the Negroes, while Pierre Munier came out last, leaving the house open, forsaken, and widowed of every human creature.

The procession, which was composed of about two hundred Negroes, followed for some time the road leading from Port-Louis to Grand-Port ; then, after about half an hour's march, turned to the right, advancing towards the base of the *Piton du Milieu*, in order to reach the source of the *Rivière des Créoles*.

Before disappearing behind the mountain, Pierre Munier, who had continued to act as rear-guard, stopped for a moment, climbed a small hill and cast a last look at this fine estate which he was forsaking. He took in at a glance those rich plains of cane, manioc, and maize, those splendid groves of shaddocks, jameroses and takamakassas, that grand horizon of mountains which enclosed his immense property like a gigantic wall. He reflected that it had taken three generations of men, honest like himself, laborious like himself, esteemed like himself, to render this district the paradise of the Island. Then, with a sigh, and brushing away a tear, he turned his eyes away and shook his head, and with a smile upon his lips overtook the litter where his wounded child was waiting for him,—the child for whose sake he was giving up all this.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE GREAT WOODS

THE day was breaking as the band of fugitives reached the source of the *Rivière des Créoles* and the rays of the eastern sun lighted up the granite summit of the *Piton du Milieu* ; and this was the signal for the entire population of the forest to awake also. At each step, the *tanrecs* got up beneath the feet of the Negroes and scuttled off to their holes, the monkeys sprang from bough to bough and scampered out on the tiniest and most flexible branches of the *vacoas*, cypresses, and tamarind trees ; then, hanging down and balancing themselves by their tails, hooked themselves on with wonderful cleverness, after a prodigious jump, to some other tree which afforded them a better shelter. The woodcock got up with a loud whirr, beating the air in his heavy flight, while the grey parrots seemed to jeer at him with their mocking

cry, and the cardinal-bird, like a flying flame, flashed by swift as lightning and sparkling like a ruby. In a word, Nature, ever youthful, ever careless, ever fruitful, as is her wont, seemed in her serene tranquillity and her calm happiness ever to mock the troubles and griefs of man.

After marching for three or four hours, the band halted on a plateau at the foot of a nameless mountain, the base of which ran down to the banks of the river. Hunger began to make itself felt, but fortunately, every one had been hunting while on the road; some with their sticks had knocked over the *tanrecs*, an animal of which the Negroes are very fond; others had killed monkeys or woodcocks; lastly, Laïza had wounded a stag, in pursuit of which four men had set out, and which they had brought back at the end of an hour. There were provisions therefore for the whole company.

Laïza profited by this halt to dress Georges' wound; he had left the litter from time to time to go and pluck some herb or plant, of which he alone knew the properties. On arriving at the resting-place he put together what he had gathered, placed the precious collection which he had just obtained in a hollow of a rock, then with a rounded stone he bruised the simples just as he would have done in a mortar. This operation concluded, he pressed out the juice, dipped a rag in it, and, removing the bandage which he had put on the previous night, placed the newly-soaked compresses upon the two orifices of the wound; for, by good luck, the bullet had not remained in the wound, but, after entering a little below the lowest left rib, had gone out a little above the hip.

Pierre Munier followed this operation with deep anxiety. The wound was serious, but not mortal; nay more, it was evident from an examination of the flesh that, supposing no important organ in the interior had been injured, the healing would perhaps be more rapid than it would have been under the hands of one of the town doctors. The poor father none the less went through all the agony which such a sight must needs arouse in him; while Georges, on the contrary, in spite of the pain which a dressing of this sort was bound to cause him, did not even contract his brow, and restrained even the slightest trembling of the hand which his father held between his own.

The dressing over and the meal finished, they resumed their journey. They were now nearing the great woods, but had still to reach them; the little band, retarded by the transport of the wounded man, which was rendered still more difficult by the irregularity of the ground, advanced but slowly, and, ever since their departure from the dwelling, had left a track easy to follow.

They marched for about an hour more, following the bank of the *Rivière des Créoles*, then turned to the left, and began to find themselves on the outskirts of the forests, for, up to now, they had only traversed a sort of underwood. As they advanced, mimosas recurring in numerous clusters, and gigantic ferns growing in the space between the trees, rose as high as themselves, while bindweeds of prodigious size, dropping from the top of the takamakass like snakes hanging by their tails, began to indicate that they were entering the region of the great woods.

Soon the forest grew thicker and thicker; the trunks of the trees were closer together, the ferns were interlaced with one another, the bindweed formed barriers through which the passage became more and more difficult, especially for the men who carried the litter. Every moment Georges, seeing the difficulties which the march presented, made a movement to get out of the litter; but, each time, Laïza forbade him in such a tone of firmness, while his father clasped his hands with such a gesture of entreaty, that, in order not to wound the devotion of the one nor offend the tenderness of the other, the sick man resumed his place and let them make fresh attempts, attempts which became every moment more painful, and which, sometimes, remained for a long while without result.

However, the difficulties experienced by the fugitives in penetrating into the interior of these virgin forests formed almost a guarantee of their security, as these difficulties would be found even greater by their pursuers, since the fugitives were Negroes accustomed to such journeys, while their pursuers were English soldiers accustomed to drill on the Champ de Mars and the Champ de Lort.

Presently, however, they arrived at a spot so thick, so full of briars, and of such compact growth, that all attempts to cross it proved ineffectual. For a long



while the little band went up and down this kind of wall, through which the axe alone could open a passage; but this passage, if opened for the one party, would be equally open for the other, and, in offering an issue for escape, would afford a means of pursuit. While searching about, they came upon an *ajoupa*, a sort of shed built by hunters as a shelter, and beneath it the remains of a fire still smouldering; it was plain that some runaway Negroes were roaming in the neighbourhood, and, judging by the freshness of the tracks they had left, could not be very far away.

Laïza started on their trail. The skill of savages in following the track of a friend or an enemy across great solitudes is well-known. Laïza, stooping to the ground, examined every twig of grass bent by the heel, every stone moved from its bed by the tread of a foot, every branch diverted from its inclination by the pressure of the passer-by; but he arrived at last at a place where all trace was lost.

On one side was a stream which came down from the mountain and fell into the *Rivière des Créoles*; on the other, a mass of rocks, stones, and brushwood resembling a wall, at the top of which the forest seemed even thicker than in other parts, while behind lay the path which Laïza had just followed. Laïza crossed the stream, and searched in vain on the other side for the track which had led him to the bank. The Negroes, for there were more than one, had therefore gone no further.

Laïza tried next to climb the wall; in this he was successful, but, on reaching the summit, he saw that it would be impossible for a band of men, several of whom were wounded, to take such a path; accordingly, he came down again, and, being convinced that those whose track he had been looking for could not be far off, he uttered the various cries by which runaway Negroes are in the habit of recognising one another, and then waited.

After a moment, he thought he saw a slight waving of the thickest of the brushwood that covered the boulders forming the wall just described. Any one else except a man habituated to the mysteries of solitudes would have thought that these branches were being shaken by the wind; but in that case the waving movement

would have been from top to bottom, whereas, on the contrary, this movement seemed to start from the bottom and gradually cease towards the extremities of the branches. This did not escape the notice of Laïza, and he fixed his glance on the thicket. His doubt soon changed into certainty; through the branches he had perceived a pair of restless eyes which, after roving in every direction, were fixed upon himself; Laïza then repeated the signal which he had already given, whereupon a man glided like a snake between the loose stones, and Laïza found himself face to face with a runaway Negro.

The two blacks exchanged only a word or two, and then Laïza returning on the track rejoined the little band, which now under his guidance took in its turn the same path which he had just taken, and soon reached the spot where he had found the Negro.

They found that an opening, made by moving some of the stones, provided a passage through the wall, and that this passage gave entrance to an immense cave.

The fugitives passed two and two through this narrow passage, so easy to defend. When the last man had passed through, the Negro replaced the stones exactly as they had been before, so that no trace of the passage was left visible; then he, too, by clinging to the brushwood and projecting edges of the rocks, scaled the wall and disappeared in the forest. Two hundred men had just been swallowed up into the bowels of the earth, and the most practised eye could not have told the spot at which they had entered.

Whether by one of those chances of Nature often met with, in which the hand of man has done nothing to bring about the effect produced, or, on the other hand, owing to long and fore-seeing toil on the part of the runaway Negroes, the top of this mountain, into the side of which the little band had just disappeared, was defended, on one side by a perpendicular rock like a rampart, and, on the other, by that gigantic hedge composed of trunks of trees, bindweed and brake, which had at first stopped the advance of our fugitives. Consequently, the only practicable entrance was the one which has been described, and, as we have said, this entrance was entirely hidden behind the

stones that blocked it up and the brush-wood that concealed the stones. Thus owing to the care with which it had been hidden from all eyes, the Colonists who, armed on their own account, had hunted runaway Negroes, or the English soldiers who, acting for the Government, had done the same, had doubtless passed a hundred times without noticing this opening, which was known to the fugitive slaves alone.

But, once on the other side of the hedge or of the cavern, the aspect of the ground changed completely. You were still in the great woods, the lofty forests, the thick cover, but it was at least possible to make your way through them, while in addition there was no lack of the first necessities of life in these vast solitudes.

A waterfall, that had its source at the summit of the peak, fell majestically from a height of sixty feet, and, after being dashed into spray against the rocks which it wore away by its perpetual fall, flowed for some time in a gentle stream. Then, suddenly plunging into the bowels of the earth, it re-appeared again beyond the enclosed space. Stags, boars, roe-deer, monkeys and *tanrecs* abounded; and, lastly, in the places where the rays of the sun shone through the immense vault of foliage, these rays lighted up shaddocks loaded with their orange globes and *vacoas* bending under their fruit, the stalks of which are so frail that the moment the fruit is ripe it falls at the slightest shake or the softest puff of wind.

So, if only the fugitives were successful in concealing their retreat, they might hope to live there without wanting for anything, until Georges should be healed and some plan for the future determined on, when the unfortunate slaves who accompanied Georges had decided to follow his fortunes to the end, whatever line of action he might decide upon.

Wounded however as Georges was, he had retained his usual coolness, and had not examined the retreat to which he had come for shelter without taking into consideration all the advantages which the position offered as a means of defence.

As soon then as he had reached the opposite side of the cave, he had stopped the litter, and, beckoning Laïza to his side, had pointed out how, after securing the

outer opening of the passage, they could by means of an intrenchment defend the inner opening, and also mine the cave with powder, which they had taken the precaution of bringing from Moka. The plan of this work was at once sketched out and taken in hand; for Georges did not disguise from himself that in all probability he would not be treated as an ordinary fugitive, and he had sufficient pride to believe that the Whites would not regard themselves as victors, so long as they did not hold him bound hand and foot in their power.

They started at once therefore on the work of defence, which was superintended passively by Georges and actively by Pierre Munier.

Meanwhile Laïza was going round the mountain, which, as we have said, was protected everywhere either by natural palisades or by precipitous rocks. At one point, however, these rocks were capable of being scaled with ladders fifteen feet in length. The road, too, which led to this natural wall ran along a precipice and would have been easy to defend but that the band was too few in number and required to be spread over too many points at once, to allow of any military dispositions being made outside of what may be called the fortress.

Laïza recognised therefore that it was this spot and the entrance to the cavern that needed to be guarded more than all others with the greatest care.

Night was now approaching; Laïza left ten men to guard this important post, and returned to give Georges an account of his examination of the mountain.

He found him in a sort of cabin which had been hastily constructed with branches. The intrenchment had already been nearly dug out, and they continued to work hard at it, in spite of the darkness now rapidly advancing.

Five and twenty men were told off for sentry duty round the enclosure, the guard to be relieved every two hours; Pierre Munier remained at his post in the cavern, and Laïza, after putting a fresh bandage on the wound, returned to his.

Then everyone awaited such fresh developments as the night would doubtless bring with it.



## CHAPTER XXV

## JUDGE AND EXECUTIONER

IN point of fact, in a war of surprises like that which was about to take place between the revolted slaves and their white enemies, who would not fail to pursue them, the darkness of night would greatly aid the attack, while adding elements of terror to the defence.

The night which had just begun was beautiful and calm ; the moon, however, now in its last quarter, would not rise until about eleven o'clock.

For men less pre-occupied with the dangers they were exposed to, and especially for men less accustomed to such sights, the gradual diminution of the daylight, amid these vast solitudes and the wild region which we have tried to depict, would have been a magnificent spectacle. The darkness first invaded the lower regions, rising like a tide along the trunks of the trees, the sides of the rocks, and the slopes of the mountain, bringing silence in its train and gradually dispersing the last gleams of day, which fled for refuge to the summit of the peak, where they hung for an instant like the flames of a volcano, then died away in their turn, submerged beneath the sea of darkness.

For eyes, however, accustomed to the night, this darkness is not total ; for ears accustomed to solitude, this silence is not absolute. The life of Nature is never quite extinguished ; to the sounds of day which are lulled asleep, succeed the awakening sounds of night. Amid the loud murmur of the rustling leaves intermingled with the prattling of the streams are heard other noises, caused by the voices or the steps of night—roving animals, sombre voices, stealthy and unexpected steps, which inspire the stoutest hearts with that mysterious emotion reason cannot fight against, since sight cannot reassure it.

None of these confused sounds escaped the trained ear of Laïza ; a wild hunter and, consequently, a man of solitude and a traveller in the night, darkness and solitude had little that was mysterious or secret for his eyes or ears. He recognised the nibbling of the *tanrecs* as they gnawed the roots of the trees, the step of the stag making for his accustomed spring, the beating of the wings of the bat in the glades, and two hours passed without any

of these sounds disturbing him from his motionless position.

Strangely enough, it was in this part of the mountain, inhabited at that moment by about two hundred men, that the silence was most absolute, and the solitude seemed most complete. The ten Negroes had lain down with their faces to the ground, so that Laïza himself could hardly distinguish them in the darkness, which was rendered still thicker by the shadow of the trees ; and though some of them were asleep, you would have said that, even in their sleep, caution made them hold their breath, which could scarcely be heard.

As for Laïza himself, resting upright against an enormous tamarind, whose flexible branches projected, not merely over the path that ran beside the rocks, but even over the precipice which lay beyond the path, he might defy the most trained eye to distinguish his body from the trunk of the huge tree with which, thanks to the night and the colour of his skin, he was completely identified.

Laïza stood thus, silent and motionless, for about an hour, when he heard behind him the noise made by several men walking over ground that is strewn with pebbles and dry branches. These steps, though cautious, seemed to make no effort to conceal themselves ; so he turned without any uneasiness, knowing that it must be a patrol which was advancing towards him. Presently, indeed, his eyes, accustomed to the darkness, distinguished six or eight men advancing, at the head of whom he recognised Pierre Munier by his height and the clothes he wore.

Laïza seemed to detach himself from the tree against which he had been leaning and went up to him.

"Well," said he, "have the men whom you sent to reconnoitre come back?"

"Yes, and the English are in pursuit of us."

"Where are they?"

"They were encamped, an hour ago, between the *Piton du Milieu* and the source of the *Rivière des Créoles*."

"They are on our track?"

"Yes ; and to-morrow we shall most likely have news of them."

"Sooner than that," answered Laïza.

"Why sooner?"

"Yes ; if we have sent out scouts, they will have done the same."

"Well?"

"Well, there are men prowling about in our neighbourhood."

"How do you know? have you heard their voices? have you recognised their step?"

"No; but I heard a stag go by, and I knew by the rapidity of his pace that he had been startled from his lair."

"You think then that some prowler is on our track?"

"I am sure of it. Hush!"

"What is it?"

"Listen—"

"Yes, I do hear a sound."

"It is a woodcock flying at two hundred yards from us."

"In which direction?"

"There!" said Laïza, extending his hand towards a clump of trees, the tops of which could be seen rising above the ravine.

"And you think it was a man that startled it?"

"A man or several men," answered Laïza; "I cannot determine the number."

"That is not what I mean. You think it was frightened by some human being?"

"Animals recognise instinctively the sounds made by other animals, and are not alarmed by them," answered Laïza.

"So then?"

"So then they are approaching. There! do you hear?" added the Negro, dropping his voice.

"What is it?" asked the old man, adopting the same precaution.

"The noise of a dry branch which has just cracked beneath the feet of one of them. Hush! for they are now nearly close enough to us to hear the sound of our voices. Hide behind this tamarind, while I go back to my post."

There was a moment's silence, during which nothing disturbed the quiet of the night, but after a few seconds came the sound of a pebble detached from the ground and rolling over the steep slope of the cliff. Laïza felt Pierre Munier's breath against his cheek. The latter was doubtless going to speak, but the Negro grasped him forcibly by the arm; the old man understood that silence was imperative, and obeyed.

At the same time the woodcock flew off noisily for the second time, uttering its peculiar cry, and passing over the top of the tamarind, made for the higher regions of the mountain.

The prowler was hardly twenty yards

from those whose track he was doubtless searching for. Laïza and Pierre Munier held their breath; the other Negroes stood as if carved in marble.

At this moment a gleam of silver began to light the summits of the chain of mountains which, through the glades of the forest, could be seen rising against the horizon. Soon the hollow outline of the waning moon appeared behind the *Morne des Créoles*, and began to move across the sky.

In direct contrast to the darkness, which had mounted upwards, the light came down from above; but this light penetrated only the open places, leaving the forest, with the exception of a few spots of ground on which the light poured through the chinks of the foliage, in profound obscurity.

At this moment, there was a slight disturbance of the branches in a thicket bordering the path and rising above the declivity, of which the rapid slope led, as we have said, to a precipice; then gradually these branches parted and allowed a man's head to pass through them.

In spite of the darkness, which however at this spot was not so great since it was not overshadowed by any tree, Pierre and Laïza noticed at the same moment the movement imparted to the thicket, for the hand of each sought and grasped the hand of the other simultaneously.

The spy remained for an instant motionless; then he thrust his head forward once more, examining with eyes and ears the whole of the space disclosed to his gaze, made another forward movement, and then, reassured by the silence which made him think that no one was near, raised himself upon his knees, and listened once more, and still seeing and hearing nothing, finally stood upright altogether.

Laïza then grasped Pierre Munier's hand more firmly to impress on him a greater caution, since, for his own part, he no longer had any doubt but that this man was looking for their track.

And, in point of fact, when the prowler reached the edge of the path, he stooped once more and examined the ground to see if it retained any trace of the tread of a number of men; then he touched the grass with the palm of his hand to see if it had been crushed; he touched the stones with the point of his finger to be quite certain they had not been disturbed



from their beds; and finally, as if even the air might have retained some traces of those for whom he was searching, he raised his head and fixed his eyes on the tamarind, against the trunk and beneath the shadow of which Laïza was concealed.

At this instant a moonbeam passed between the tops of two trees and threw its light on the spy's face.

Then, with a movement quick as lightning Laïza disengaged his right hand from Pierre Munier's hand, and, springing with one bound so as to seize at its extremity one of the most flexible branches of the tree which sheltered him, dived with the swiftness of a swooping eagle to the foot of the rock and seized the spy by his girdle; then, giving with his foot an impulse to the branch which now sprang up again, mounted with him as the eagle soars with its prey. Then slipping his hand along the smooth and polished bark of the bough, he fell at the foot of the tree in the midst of his companions, still grasping his prisoner, who, knife in hand, strove vainly to wound his captor, as the snake strives vainly to bite the king of the air which carries him off from the depths of a marsh to his eyrie near the sky.

Then, in spite of the darkness, every one at the first glance recognised the prisoner, who was none other than Antonio the Malay. All this had happened so swiftly and so unexpectedly that Antonio had not uttered a sound.

At last then Laïza held his mortal enemy in his power, and was about to inflict instant punishment on the traitor and assassin.

He was pressing him beneath his knee, looking at him with that terrible smile of the victor by which the vanquished realises that there is nothing to hope for, when suddenly the distant barking of a dog was heard.

Without loosing the hand with which he grasped his throat, or the hand by which he held his wrist, Laïza raised his head and listened in the direction whence the sound had come.

At this sound Laïza felt Antonio shudder.

"Everything at its proper time," murmured Laïza, as if speaking to himself.

Then, addressing the Negroes who surrounded him :

"First fasten this fellow to a tree," said he; "I must speak to M. Munier."

The Negroes seized Antonio by his hands and feet and tied him with bindweed to the trunk of a takamaka. Laïza made certain that he was tied securely, and then, leading the old man a few paces away, stretched his hand in the direction whence he had heard the dog's bark.

"Did you hear that?" he asked him.

"What?" asked the old man.

"The bark of a dog."

"No."

"Listen, it's coming nearer."

"Yes, I heard it that time."

"They are hunting us like stags."

"What! do you think it is we they are pursuing?"

"What should you think it is then?"

"Some dog that has escaped, hunting on his own account."

"Yes, that is possible, after all," murmured Laïza; "let us listen."

There was a moment's silence, at the end of which more barking re-echoed through the forest, nearer at hand than on the previous occasions.

"It is we they are chasing."

"And how do you know that?"

"That is not the bark of a dog hunting," said Laïza, "it is the howling of a dog in search of his master. The devils must have found a dog chained up in some Negro's hut, and taken him to guide them; if that Negro is with us, we are lost."

"It is Fidèle's voice," murmured Pierre Munier with a start.

"Yes, yes, I recognise it now," said Laïza. "I have heard it before; it is the dog that howled last night, when we brought your son wounded to Moka."

"I quite forgot to bring him when we started; still, if it were Fidèle, I think he would be running faster. Listen how slowly his voice comes nearer!"

"They are holding him in a leash and following him; he has perhaps a whole regiment at his heels. You must not be angry with the poor beast," added the Anjouan Negro with a grim smile, "he cannot go any faster. But don't be uneasy, he will come sure enough."

"Well, what is to be done?" asked Pierre Munier.

"If you had any vessel waiting for you at Grand-Port, I should say that as we are but eight or ten leagues from it, there was still time for us to get there; but you have

no chance of escape in that direction, have you?"

"None."

"Then we must defend ourselves, and, if possible," added the Negro in a gloomy tone, "die in doing so."

"Come then," said Pierre Munier, regaining all his courage the moment it was a question of fighting. "Come then, for the dog will lead them to the opening of the cavern, and it will take them some time to get in, even when they are there."

"Very well," said Laïza, "away with you then to the intrenchments."

"But why do you not come with me?"

"I? Oh! I must wait here for a few moments longer."

"But you will join us again?"

"When the first gun is fired, turn round and you will see me at your side."

The old man extended his hand to Laïza, for the common danger had obliterated all difference of rank between them; then he threw his gun over his shoulder, and, followed by his escort, went off at a rapid pace towards the entrance to the cavern.

Laïza followed him with his eyes until he was quite lost in the darkness; then, turning to Antonio, whom the Negroes according to his orders had bound to a tree, he said:

"And now, Antonio, for you and me."

"You and me?" said Antonio in a trembling voice. "And what does Laïza want with his friend and brother?"

"I want him to remember what was said on the evening of the Yamsé by the bank of the *Rivière des Lataniers*."

"Many things were said, and my brother Laïza was very eloquent, for everybody followed his advice."

"And among those things does Antonio remember the sentence pronounced beforehand against traitors?"

Antonio shuddered from head to foot, and, in spite of the copper tint of his skin, might have been seen to turn pale, had it been daylight.

"My brother appears to have lost his memory," resumed Laïza in a tone of cutting irony; "well, I am going to bring it back to him. It was said that, in case a traitor should be found among us, any of us might put an end to him by a death prompt or lingering, gentle or terrible. Are those the exact words of

the oath, and does my brother remember them?"

"I remember them," said Antonio in a scarcely articulate voice.

"Well then, answer the questions I am going to put to you," said Laïza.

"I do not recognise your right to question me; you are not my judge," cried Antonio.

"Then I shall question some one else," replied Laïza.

Then, turning to the Negroes who were lying round him on the ground:

"Get up, you others, and answer."

The Negroes obeyed, and some ten or twelve black figures silently ranged themselves in a semi-circle in front of the tree to which Antonio was tied.

"They are slaves," cried Antonio, "and I ought not to be judged by slaves; I am no Negro, I am free. It is for a court to judge me if I have committed a crime, and not for you."

"That will do," said Laïza. "We will judge you first, and then you shall appeal to whom you choose."

Antonio held his tongue, and, in the moment of silence which followed the injunction Laïza had just given him, the bark of the dog was heard drawing nearer.

"Since the culprit will not answer," said Laïza to the Negroes who surrounded Antonio, "you must answer for him. Who was it that denounced the conspiracy to the Governor, because some one else and not himself had been named as leader?"

"Antonio the Malay," answered all the Negroes in a low tone, but unanimously.

"It is not true!" cried Antonio. "It is not true! I swear it! I protest!"

"Silence!" said Laïza in the same imperative tone.

Then he resumed:

"Who was it that, after denouncing the conspiracy to the Governor, shot at our leader, by the base of the little mountain, and wounded him?"

"Antonio the Malay," answered all the Negroes.

"Who saw me?" cried the Malay: "Who dares to say it was I? Who could distinguish one man from another in the darkness?"

"Silence!" said Laïza.

Then, continuing in the same calm tone of inquiry, he said:



"Lastly, after denouncing the conspiracy to the Governor and trying to murder our leader, who was it came in the night crawling like a snake round our retreat, to discover some opening by which the English soldiers might enter?"

"Antonio the Malay," replied the Negroes once more, with the same accent of conviction that had not failed them for an instant.

"I was coming to join my brothers," cried the prisoner; "I was coming to share their lot, whatever it might be, I swear and protest I was."

"Do you believe what he says?" asked Laïza.

"No! no! no!" chorussed all the voices.

"My kind friends," said Antonio, "listen to me, I entreat you!"

"Silence!" said Laïza. Then he continued, with the same accent of solemnity which he had maintained all the time, and which indicated the greatness of the duty which he had imposed upon himself:

"Antonio is not once, but three times, a traitor; Antonio then would deserve to die three times, if that were possible. Antonio, prepare to appear before the Great Spirit, for you are about to die!"

"It is murder!" cried Antonio, "and you have no right to murder a free man. Besides, the English cannot be far off; I will appeal to them, I will shout. Help! help! They are cutting my throat! they are——"

Laïza took the Malay by the throat and smothered his cries between his fingers of iron; then, turning towards the negroes:

"Get a rope ready," he said.

On hearing this order, which foreshadowed the fate awaiting him, Antonio struggled so violently that he broke some of the bonds which held him. But he could not free himself from the most terrible of them all, the hand of Laïza. After some seconds, however, the Negro realised, by the convulsions which he felt running through Antonio's whole frame, that, if he continued to grasp him so tightly, there would soon be no need for a rope. So he relaxed his hold on the throat of the prisoner, who let his head fall on his breast like a man with the death-rattle in his throat.

"I said that I would grant you time to appear before the Great Spirit," said

Laïza; "you have ten minutes, prepare yourself."

Antonio tried to pronounce some words, but his voice failed him.

The barking of the dog was heard drawing nearer every moment.

"Where is the rope?" said Laïza.

"Here," answered a Negro, handing Laïza the article which he asked for.

"Good," said he.

And, the office of the Judge having been completed, that of the Executioner began.

Laïza took hold of one of the strongest branches of the tamarind, pulled it towards him and fastened one end of the rope to it, then made a running knot of the other end and passed it over Antonio's head. Next he ordered two Negroes to hold the branch, and, having assured himself that the condemned man, spite of the rupture of two or three of his bands, was still secured tightly, he bade him a second time prepare for death.

The condemned man had now recovered speech; but, instead of using it to implore the mercy of God, he raised his voice to make a last appeal to the pity of men.

"Well, yes, my brothers, yes, my friends," said he, changing his tactics, and trying to obtain by confession what had been refused to his denials, "yes, I am very guilty, I know, and you have the right to treat me as you are doing; but you will pardon your old comrade, will you not? your comrade who used to amuse you in the evenings? poor Antonio, who used to tell you such nice stories and sang you such rousing songs! How will you do without him? who will amuse and distract you? who will make you forget the fatigue of the day's work? Let me off, my friends! let poor Antonio off! I ask you on my knees for my life!"

"Think of the Great Spirit," said Laïza; "for you have but five minutes to live, Antonio."

"Instead of five minutes, Laïza, kind Laïza," resumed Antonio in a tone of entreaty, "give me five years, and during those five years I will be your slave; I will follow you, be always at your orders, always ready to obey you, and, when I fail, or commit the slightest fault, well, then you shall punish me, and I will bear the lash, the rod, the rope, without complaint, and say that you are a kind master for having given me my life. Oh! Laïza, give me my life, give me my life!"

"Listen, Antonio," said Laïza, "do you hear that dog barking?"

"Yes; and you think it was I who advised its being let loose? no, you are wrong, I swear it."

"Antonio," said Laïza, "it would not have entered the head of even a White to employ a dog to hunt down his own master. This idea was yours, Antonio."

The Malay uttered a deep groan; then, after an instant, as though he hoped to melt his foe by dint of humility, he said:

"Well, yes, it was mine. The Great Spirit had forsaken me, the thirst for revenge had made me mad. You must show pity for a madman, Laïza; pardon me, in the name of your brother Nazim."

"And who was it again who betrayed Nazim, when Nazim wanted to escape? Ah! that is a name that you were very foolish to pronounce, Antonio. The five minutes are up. Malay, you are going to die."

"Oh! no, no, no! not to die!" said Antonio. "Pardon, Laïza! pardon, my friends!"

But, without listening to the complaints, the entreaties, or the prayers of the condemned man, Laïza drew his knife and at a blow cut all the ties which bound Antonio. At the same instant the two men, at an order from him, let go the branch, which sprang back, carrying with it the unfortunate Malay.

A shriek, terrible, supreme, a shriek in which seemed to be combined all the strength of despair, resounded and then died away in mournful accents and was lost in the depths of the forest. All was over, and Antonio was nothing but a corpse swinging at the end of the rope above the precipice.

Laïza remained for an instant motionless, watching the movements of the rope as its vibration gradually diminished; then, when it almost described a perpendicular and motionless line against the blue of the sky, he listened once more to the barking of the dog, which was now hardly more than a hundred yards from the cavern. He picked up his gun which he had laid on the ground, and, turning to the other Negroes, said:

"Come, my friends, we are avenged; now, we can die."

And, starting off at a rapid pace, he marched at their head towards the intrenchments.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### NIGGER HUNTING

LAÏZA had not been mistaken, and the dog, in following the track of his master, had led the English straight to the entrance of the cavern. Here he had dashed into the brushwood and had begun to scratch and to bite at the stones. Then the English knew they were at the end of their pursuit.

They immediately sent forward soldiers armed with picks, who fell to work, and in a few minutes effected an opening large enough to admit a man's body. A soldier pushed his body through, in order to look into the opening. Instantly a shot was heard, and the soldier fell, his breast pierced by a bullet; a second soldier succeeded the first, and fell in the same way; a third advanced in his turn and shared the same fate.

It was evident from the rebels having themselves given the signal for attack, that they were resolved to make a desperate defence.

The assailants began to go to work more cautiously; sheltering themselves as much as they could, they enlarged the breach so that several men could enter abreast; the drums beat, and the Grenadiers advanced with fixed bayonets.

But the besieged occupied such an advantageous position that in an instant the breach was littered with dead, and the bodies had to be removed to make room for a second assault.

This time the English penetrated to the middle of the cavern, but only to leave a still larger number of dead than at the previous advance; sheltered behind the intrenchment which Georges had ordered to be raised, the Negroes, under the direction of Laïza and Pierre Munier, fired with unerring accuracy.

Meanwhile, Georges, incapacitated by his wound, and lying in his cabin, cursed the inactivity to which he was reduced; the smell of powder which enveloped him, the noise of musketry crackling in his ear, everything, including the successive charges made by the English, aroused in him that ardent fever of battle which makes a man stake his life on the whim of accident. But, in this case, it was much worse, for it was no foreign cause that was being fought out, it was no question of supporting the pleasure of a



king, or of a Nation's honour that had to be avenged. No, it was his own personal cause which these men were defending, while he, Georges, the man of stout heart, of adventurous spirit, could do nothing, neither in action, nor even in counsel; and Georges bit the mattress on which he was lying, Georges wept with vexation.

At the second attack, when the English succeeded in reaching the middle of the cavern, they fired, from the point which they had gained, several volleys at the intrenchment, and, as the cabin in which Georges was lying was just behind the intrenchment, two or three bullets whizzed through the branches forming its walls. This sound, which would have alarmed any one else, consoled and elated Georges, since he reflected that he, too, was in danger, and that if he could not inflict death, he might at least meet it.

The English had for the moment desisted from the attack; but it was evident that they were preparing for a fresh assault, and you could hear, from the heavy and resounding blows of the pick-axe, that they had not abandoned their project. In point of fact, after a short interval, a portion of the outer wall of the cavern fell in, thereby doubling the size of the opening. Immediately the drums beat again, and, by the light of the moon, the bayonets were seen for the third time gleaming at the entrance to the cavern.

Pierre Munier and Laïza exchanged glances; this time, it was evident the struggle would be a terrible one.

"What is your last resource?" asked Laïza.

"The cavern is mined," said the old man.

"In that case, we have still a chance of safety, but, at the decisive moment, you must do as I tell you, or we are all lost, for it is not possible to retreat with a wounded man."

"Well, I shall kill myself at his side," said the old man.

"It would be better that both of you should escape."

"Together?"

"Together or separately, it matters little which."

"I shall not leave my son, Laïza, I warn you."

"You will leave him, if it is his only means of safety."

"What do you mean?"

"I will explain, later on."

Then, turning to the Negroes, he explained:

"Come, children, the supreme moment has arrived. Fire on the redcoats, and don't waste a shot; in an hour's time powder and ball will be scarce."

Immediately the fusillade broke out. The Negroes as a rule are excellent shots; they therefore carried out Laïza's injunctions to the letter, and the ranks of the English began to be thinned. But, after each discharge, the ranks closed up again with admirable discipline, and the column, which had been delayed by the first difficulties of the passage, continued to advance up the cave. Not a shot was now fired by the English, who appeared determined this time to carry the intrenchment at the point of the bayonet.

The situation, serious as it was for all, was doubly so for Georges, thanks to the helplessness to which he was condemned. He had at first raised himself on his elbow; then he had got upon his knees, and at last succeeded in struggling to his feet. But, having reached this point, his weakness became so great, that the earth seemed to give way beneath him, and he was forced to cling with his hands to the branches which surrounded him. While recognising the courage of the few devoted men who accompanied his fortunes to the end, he could not refrain from admiring the cool and imperturbable bravery of the English, who continued to march as if on parade, although, at each step they took, they were obliged to close up their ranks. He realised that this time they did not mean to retreat, and that in five minutes' time they would carry the intrenchment, spite of the fire that issued from it. Then, the thought that it was for him, forced as he was to remain an inactive spectator of the combat, that all these men were about to be killed, filled his heart with remorse; he tried to step forward and throw himself between the combatants and put a stop to the slaughter by surrendering himself, since, in all probability, it was against himself alone that they bore ill-will. But he felt unable to traverse a third of the distance that divided him from the English. He wanted to call out to the besieged to cease their fire, to the besiegers to advance no further, and that he would give himself up; but his enfeebled voice was lost in the roar of the fusillade. Besides, at this moment he

saw his father stand up, showing half his height above the intrenchment, then advance a few steps towards the English with a branch of fir blazing in his hand, and, amid the fire and smoke, lower this strange torch to the ground. Instantly a train of flame ran along the earth and, burying itself in the soil, disappeared; then, at the same moment, the ground shook, a terrible explosion was heard, a flaming crater opened beneath the feet of the English, the vault of the cavern yawned and sank down, the rocks which lay upon it buried themselves with it, and, amid the cries of the rest of the regiment who were still on the farther side of the opening, the subterranean passage disappeared in a yawning chasm.

"Now," said Laïza, "there is not a moment to lose."

"Give your orders; what must be done?"

"Fly towards Grand-Port and try to find refuge on a French ship; I will look after Georges."

"I will not leave my son, I told you so."

"And I told you that you will leave him; for, by remaining, you destroy him."

"How is that?"

"With your dog, which they have still got, they are following you everywhere, driving you into the thickest part of the forest, reaching you in the deepest of caverns, and Georges, wounded as he is, will be soon overtaken. But, on the other hand, if you fly on your own account, they will think that your son is accompanying you; then it is you they will pursue; it is you they will be intent upon; it is you they will perhaps overtake. Meantime I profit by the darkness, and carry Georges, with four devoted men, in another direction; we shall reach the woods which surround the *Morne du Bambou*. If you find any means of saving us, you will light a fire on the *Ile des Oiseaux*; then we will go down the *Grande-Rivière* on a raft, and you will come with a boat and take us in at the mouth of the river."

Pierre Munier had listened to all this with eyes fixed, and breathing suspended, pressing Laïza's hands between his own; then, as he finished, he threw his arms round his neck and cried:

"Laïza! Laïza! yes, yes, I understand; it is the only way, with all this English pack at my heels. Yes, that is the way, and you will save my Georges."

"I will save him or die with him," said Laïza; "that is all I can promise."

"And I know that you will keep your promise. Only wait while I go and embrace my son once more, and then I will start."

"No, no," said Laïza; "if you see him, you will not want to leave him; if he knows that you are exposing yourself to danger to save his life, he will not allow you to do it. Go then, go! And follow him, all of you; four men only come with me, the strongest, most vigorous, and most devoted."

Some dozen men stepped forward, of whom Laïza selected four; then, as Pierre Munier hesitated to start:

"The English! the English!" he cried to the old man; "they will be here in a moment."

"At the mouth of the *Grande-Rivière* then?" cried Pierre.

"Yes, if we are not taken or killed."

"Farewell, Georges, farewell!" cried Pierre Munier. And, followed by the remaining Negroes, he rushed off in the direction of the *Montagne des Créoles*.

"Father," cried Georges, "where are you going? what are you doing? why do you not come and die with your son? Wait for me, father, here I am."

But Pierre Munier was already far away, and the last words, especially, were uttered in so feeble a tone that the old man could not hear them.

Laïza ran to the wounded man, and found him on his knees.

"Father!" murmured Georges, and fell back in a faint.

Laïza lost no time; this fainting fit was almost a stroke of luck. Doubtless, had Georges been conscious, he would not have wished to make any further struggle for his life with those who were pursuing him, and would have looked upon this solitary flight as a thing to be ashamed of. His weakness, however, placed him at the mercy of Laïza. The latter laid him, still unconscious, on the litter; each of the Negroes whom he had kept with him took one of its handles, and, going ahead himself to point out the road, he made for the direction of the *Trois-Îlots*, whence he hoped, by following the course of the *Grande-Rivière*, to reach the *Piton du Bambou*.

They had not gone a quarter of a league when they heard the barking of a dog.



At a gesture from Laïza the bearers halted. Georges was still unconscious, or at least so exhausted that he appeared to take no notice of what was going on.

What Laïza had foreseen had happened; the English had scaled the enclosure, and reckoned on using the dog in order to overtake the fugitives a second time, as they had already done once.

There was a moment of painful suspense during which Laïza listened to the dog's barking; for some time the sound remained stationary. The dog had come to the spot where the encounter had taken place; presently, two or three barks sounded still nearer. The dog was going from the intrenchment where Georges had remained for some time and where his father had gone to visit him. Finally the noise of the barks died away in a southerly direction; the stratagem of Laïza had been successful; the hunters were foiled in the scent, and, abandoning the son, were following the father.

The situation was now all the more grave that, during this brief halt, the first gleams of day had appeared, and the mysterious darkness of the forest began to be lighted up. Certainly, had Georges been in his usual health and vigour, the perplexity would have been less, for in that case craft, courage, and skill would have been present in equal proportions on both sides, between pursuers and pursued; but the fact that Georges was wounded made the game unequal, and Laïza did not disguise from himself the fact that the position was most critical.

One apprehension, especially, engaged his thoughts, namely, that in all probability the English might have taken as auxiliaries some slaves trained to the pursuit of runaway Negroes, and have made them some promise, as, for example, of freedom, if Georges should fall into their hands. In that case Laïza would lose part of his advantage as a man intimate with Nature, by being pitted against similar men for whom, like himself, solitude had no secrets and night no mysteries.

He concluded therefore that there was not a moment to lose, and, his uncertainty as to the direction which the pursuers would take being now resolved, he resumed the march, making always towards the East.

The forest had a strange aspect, and

all the animals seemed to share in the uneasiness of man. The firing, which had resounded all night long, had awakened the birds in the branches, the boars in their lairs, the deer in their thickets; everything was on the move, everything in a state of alarm; you might have thought that all living creatures were seized with a kind of giddiness.

They marched thus for two hours, when it became necessary to halt. The Negroes had been fighting all night and had eaten nothing since four o'clock the previous evening. Laïza halted under the ruins of a shed which had evidently that very night served as a shelter for runaway Negroes; for, on stirring a heap of ashes, the result apparently of a fairly long stay, they found them still alight.

Three of the Negroes went off to hunt for *tanrecs*. The fourth busied himself in rekindling the hearth, while Laïza searched for herbs to renew the wounded man's bandages.

Strong as Georges was in body and vigorous in mind, his moral forces had been overcome by the material; he was now in a fever of delirium, ignorant of what was going on, unable to help by advice or action those who were trying to save him.

The dressing of the wound, however, appeared to soothe him. As for Laïza, he seemed to triumph over all the physical wants of nature. For sixty hours he had not slept, yet he seemed to need no sleep; for twenty hours he had not tasted food, and yet did not seem to be hungry.

The Negroes came back one after the other with six or eight *tanrecs*, which they hastened to roast before the large fire, which their comrade had made: Laïza was rather uneasy about the smoke, but he reflected that they must now have travelled two or three leagues at least from the spot where the fight took place, without leaving any track behind them, and that, even supposing this smoke was observed, it would only be by some outpost sufficiently far off to allow them time to escape before they were overtaken.

When the meal was finished, the Negroes called Laïza, who had remained seated near Georges. Laïza got up, and, on looking at the group whom he hastily rejoined, noticed that one of the Negroes had received a wound in the thigh which was still bleeding.

This discovery destroyed all his feeling of security; his track would be followed like that of a wounded deer, not, perhaps, because the pursuers suspected the importance of the capture which they might make by following the track, but because the capture of any prisoner, whoever he might be, would be, owing to the information which he could supply, of too great importance for the English not to do all in their power to secure such a capture.

Just as this reflection struck him, and as he was opening his mouth to bid the four Negroes who were squatting round the fire resume their march, a small cluster of trees, thicker than the rest of the forest, and on which his uneasy eyes had rested more than once, burst into flame, a brisk discharge of musketry was heard, and five or six bullets whizzed round him. One of the Negroes fell forward into the fire, the three others jumped up; but, after running five or six yards, a second fell, and then a third about ten yards farther on. The fourth alone escaped safe and sound and disappeared into the woods.

At the sight of the smoke, the sound of the discharge, and the whistling of the bullets, Laïza sprang with one bound to the litter where Georges was lying; and, snatching him up in his arms as if he were a child, dashed off in his turn into the forest, not appearing to slacken his pace in the slightest degree for the burden he was bearing.

Immediately eight or ten of the English soldiers, escorted by five or six Negroes, leaped out of the cluster of trees and started in pursuit of the fugitives, of whom they had recognised Georges to be one, knowing that he was wounded. As Laïza had foreseen, the blood had guided them. They had followed the track, and arrived within half rifle-range of the shed, then had aimed with rested rifles, and, as we have seen, had aimed well, since three out of the four Negroes had been, if not killed, at least disabled.

Now began a desperate chase; for it was evident that, however great the strength and activity of Laïza, he could not succeed in getting out of sight of his pursuers, who must overtake him in the end. Unhappily, he was placed between two dangers almost equally fatal; if he plunged into the thickest of the forest, it might become so dense that it would be

almost impossible to proceed farther; if he kept to the more open parts, he would expose himself to the fire of the enemy. However he preferred the latter alternative.

At the start, and by dint of his rapid dash, Laïza found himself almost beyond range of their rifles, and, had it been only the English with whom he had to deal, he would doubtless have got away. But, though it was perhaps with reluctance that the Negroes joined in the pursuit, still, as they were urged on by the soldiers with their bayonets, they were compelled to go forward, and so run down their human quarry, if not with enthusiasm, at least from motives of fear.

From time to time, when Laïza could be seen through the trees, some shots were fired at him, and the bullets grazed the bark of the trees round him or furrowed the earth at his feet. But, as though he bore an enchanted life, none of these bullets touched him, and his pace was quickened, if one may so say, by reason of the danger which he had just escaped.

At last he arrived at the edge of the glade; a steep and almost unprotected slope, with another thicket of trees at its summit, had to be climbed; but, the summit once reached, Laïza would at least be able to disappear behind some rock, slip down some ravine, and thus avoid the sight of his pursuers. On the other hand, he would remain unprotected and exposed to their fire throughout the whole interval that separated him from the trees.

There was, however, no room for hesitation; to turn to right or left was to lose ground; chance had, so far, favoured the fugitives, the same good luck might still attend them.

Laïza dashed into the glade; the pursuers in their turn, seeing an opportunity of firing in the open, redoubled their speed. Laïza was now about fifty yards ahead.

Then, as though by word of command, each soldier halted, took aim, and fired. Laïza appeared not to be touched, and continued his course. The soldiers had still time to reload their weapons before he disappeared, and hastily slipped the cartridges into the breech of their rifles.

Meanwhile, Laïza was gaining ground rapidly; it was plain that, if he escaped the second discharge as he had done the first, and reached the thicket safe and sound, all the chances would be in his



favour. Scarcely twenty-five yards separated him from the edge of the thicket, and, during the brief halt of his pursuers, he had gained a hundred and fifty yards on them. Suddenly, he disappeared in a bend of the ground; but, unfortunately, its winding did not extend either to right or left. He followed it, however, as far as he could, in order to baffle his enemies; but, on reaching the extremity of the little ravine the shoulder of which had protected him, he was obliged to climb the slope once more, and, consequently, to show himself again. At this moment ten or a dozen shots were fired simultaneously, and his pursuers seemed to see him stagger. In point of fact, after taking a few steps, Laïza stopped, staggered again, fell on one knee, then on both, and laid Georges, who was still unconscious, on the ground. Then, rising to his full height, he turned towards the English, extending both his hands towards them with a final gesture of menace and fierce malediction, and, drawing his knife from his girdle, plunged it up to the hilt in his breast.

The soldiers dashed forward, uttering loud shouts of delight, like hunters at a death-halloo. Laïza remained standing for a few seconds; then, suddenly, fell like a tree torn up by the roots; the blade of the knife had pierced his heart.

On reaching the two fugitives, the soldiers found Laïza dead, and Georges dying. Georges, with a last effort, to avoid falling alive into the hands of his enemies, had torn the bandages from his wounds, and the blood was gushing forth in torrents.

As for Laïza, besides the blow aimed at his heart with the knife, he had received a bullet in his thigh, and another which had pierced his breast through and through.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE REHEARSAL

ALL that passed during the two or three days following the catastrophe which we have just related left but a vague impression on the mind of Georges. His intellect, disordered by

delirium, retained only dim recollections, which did not allow him to calculate the flight of time or to distinguish one event from another. One morning, however, he woke as from a sleep disturbed by dreadful dreams, and, on opening his eyes, realised that he was in a prison. The Surgeon-Major of the regiment stationed at Port-Louis was by his side.

On recalling, however, all that he could remember, Georges succeeded in retracing the events which had happened, but grouped, as it were, in large masses, much as through the fog you get a glimpse of lakes, mountains and forests. Everything came back to him, down to the moment when he was wounded. His arrival at Moka and his departure with his father had not quite escaped his memory, but everything, from the time of his reaching the great woods, was vague and indistinct, like a dream. However, the only indisputable, positive, and fatal certainty was that he was now in the hands of his enemies. Georges was too scornful to put any question, too proud to ask any service, so he could learn nothing of what had happened. His heart was distracted, however, by two terrible anxieties:

Had his father escaped?

Did Sara still love him?

These two thoughts pervaded his whole being; when one of them disappeared, it was to make room for the other; they were like two ceaseless tides beating in turns upon his heart with their everlasting ebb and flow.

But there were no outward indications of this tempest which was raging in his mind. His face remained pale, cold and unruffled as a marble statue, not only in presence of all who visited the prison, but even in presence of himself.

When the doctor considered the wounded man strong enough to undergo an examination, he informed the authorities, and on the next day the examining Magistrate, accompanied by a clerk, presented himself before Georges. Georges was still unable to leave his bed, but he did the honours of his room nevertheless to the two officials with a patience full of dignity, and, leaning on his elbow, declared that he was ready to answer any questions that might be put to him.

Our readers are too well acquainted with the character of Georges to think that the idea had for a moment occurred

to him of denying any of the facts with which he was charged. Not merely did he answer with absolute truth all the questions put to him, but he even promised, not that day, for he felt too weak, but on the morrow, that he would himself dictate to the clerk the whole story of the conspiracy in detail. The offer was too courteous to be declined by the Magistrate. Georges had a two-fold object in making this proposal; first, to hasten the progress of the trial, secondly, to take the whole of the responsibility upon himself.

The two officials presented themselves next day. Georges gave them the account which he had promised; when, however, he was passing over in silence the proposals which had been made to him by Laïza, the Magistrate interrupted him with the remark that he was omitting an extenuating circumstance which, owing to the death of Laïza, could not now be charged against any one.

It was thus that Georges learned the death of Laïza and its accompanying circumstances; for, as we have said, all these events were, so far as he was concerned, shrouded in obscurity.

Not once was his father's name pronounced, either by himself or the others, nor was the name of Sara, for stronger reasons still, as you may suppose, so much as mentioned.

This declaration by Georges rendered any other inquiry superfluous. Georges therefore ceased to receive any visits except from the doctor.

One morning the doctor, on entering the room, found Georges standing up.

"Sir," said he, "I forbade you to get up for some days; you are not sufficiently strong yet."

"That is to say, my dear doctor," answered Georges, "that you do me the injustice of confounding me with the ordinary criminal, who delays the day of trial as long as he possibly can; whereas, I confess it frankly, I am in a hurry to get it over. Now do you think, in all conscience, that it is worth while getting so thoroughly healed, merely in order to die? For my own part, I think that, provided I have strength enough to mount the scaffold properly, it is all that can be required of me, and all that I can require of God."

"But who tells you that you will be condemned to death?" said the doctor.

"My own conscience, doctor; I have played a game in which my head was at stake. I have lost, and am ready to pay; that is all."

"All the same," said the doctor, "I am of opinion that you need a few days' care still before exposing yourself to the fatigue of a trial and the excitement of being sentenced."

But, that very day, Georges wrote to the examining Magistrate that his wound was completely healed, and that consequently, he was at the disposal of justice.

Two days afterwards the trial began.

Georges, on appearing before the Judges, looked round him with anxiety and was delighted to see that he was the only person charged.

Then he glanced confidently down the hall; the whole Town was present at the hearing, with the exception of M. de Malmédie, Henri, and Sara.

Some of the spectators appeared to pity the accused man, but the majority of the faces wore an expression of satisfied hatred.

As for Georges, his demeanour was calm and haughty, as ever. He was dressed, as usual, in a black frock-coat and cravat, with white waistcoat and trousers; his double riband was knotted at his button-hole.

An advocate for the defence had been appointed for him, Georges having declined to choose one. His wish was that no attempt even should be made to plead his cause.

What Georges himself said was not a defence, but a history of his whole life. He did not conceal the fact that he had returned to the Isle of France with the intention of overcoming, by all the means in his power, the prejudice oppressing men of colour; only, he did not breathe a word of the causes which had hastened the execution of his protest.

One of the Judges questioned him in regard to M. de Malmédie, but Georges asked to be allowed not to reply.

In spite of the facilities given to the Court by Georges, the discussion none the less dragged on for three days; even when they have nothing to say, lawyers must always talk.

The Advocate-General spoke for four hours and pulverised Georges.

Georges listened to the whole of this long harangue with the greatest calmness,



bowing in token of assent from time to time.

Then, when the speech of the Public Prosecutor was finished, the President asked Georges if he wished to say anything.

"Nothing," answered Georges, "except that the Advocate-General has been very eloquent."

It was now the turn of the Advocate-General to bow, which he did.

The President announced that the discussion was closed, and Georges was taken back to his prison, the sentence having to be pronounced in the absence of the accused, and to be communicated to him afterwards.

Georges on entering the prison asked for paper and ink in order to write his will. Sentences inflicted by English law not entailing confiscation, he was able to dispose of his fortune. He left to the doctor who had attended him £3,000 sterling ;

To the Governor of the prison, £1,000 sterling ;

To each of the turnkeys, one thousand dollars.

This was a fortune to each of the recipients.

To Sara he left a gold ring that had come to him from his mother.

As he was about to sign his name at the foot of the document, the clerk entered. Georges rose, with the pen in his hand, and the clerk read the sentence.

As Georges had always expected, he was condemned to the penalty of death.

When the reading was over Georges bowed, and sitting down again signed his name, without its being possible to notice the slightest difference between the handwriting in the body of the document and that of the signature.

Then he went to a glass, and looked to see if he was at all paler than before. His face was exactly as it had been, pale but calm. He was pleased with himself, and smiled to himself, as he murmured :

"Well, I thought a man would betray more feeling than that on hearing his death sentence."

The doctor came to see him, and, from force of habit, asked him how he was feeling.

"Oh! very well, doctor," answered Georges; "you have made a wonderful cure, and it is annoying that you are not allowed time to complete it."

Then he inquired if the mode of execution had been changed since the occupation of the Island by the British; and the assurance that it still continued the same greatly pleased Georges, since it was not the ignoble gibbet of London, nor the hideous guillotine of Paris. No, execution at Port-Louis had a picturesque and romantic aspect, at the thought of which Georges did not feel degraded. A Negro, acting as executioner, beheaded the condemned man with an axe. It was thus that Charles the First, and Mary Stuart, Cinq-Mars and De Thou had died. The mode of execution enters largely into the question of how death is faced.

Then he passed into a physiological discussion with the doctor on the probability of physical suffering after the head was severed from the body. The doctor maintained that death must be instantaneous, while Georges thought the contrary, and quoted two instances in support of his opinion. Once, in Egypt, he had seen a slave beheaded; the victim knelt, and the executioner severed his head at a blow, the head rolling seven or eight yards away; the body immediately rose upon its feet, took two or three aimless steps waving its arms in the air, and then fell, not quite dead, but still in the last throes. On another day, when in the same country, he had been present at a similar execution, and had, in his perpetual desire for investigation, picked up the head at the instant it was separated from the body, and, raising it by the hair to a level with his mouth, had asked in Arabic: "Do you suffer?" At this question, the victim's eyes had opened, and his lips had moved, trying to frame an answer. Georges therefore felt convinced that life survived for a few moments at least after execution.

The doctor ended by agreeing with his opinion, it being really his own as well; he had thought it, however, his duty to give the condemned man the only consolation that the promise of an easy and gentle death could afford.

The day passed just as the preceding days had done, except that he wrote to his father and brother. For one moment he took up his pen to write to Sara; but, whatever the motive was that restrained him, he stopped, and pushed the paper away, letting his head fall upon his hands. He remained a long time in this position, and any one who had seen him raise his

forehead, which he did with the haughty and disdainful movement habitual with him, would hardly have observed that his eyes were slightly red, and that a tear carelessly brushed away trembled at the end of his long dark lashes.

The cause of this was that, since the day when, at the Governor's house, he had refused to marry the beautiful Creole, not only had he not seen her, but had not even heard her name mentioned.

However, he could not believe that she had forgotten him.

Night came; and Georges, going to bed at his usual hour, slept as well as he had done on the previous night. On rising next morning he sent for the Governor of the prison.

"Sir," said he, "I have a favour to ask of you."

"What is it?" said the Governor.

"I should like to say a few words to the executioner."

"I must have the authority of the Governor of the Island."

"Oh!" said Georges smiling, "make the request from me; Lord Murray is a gentleman, and will not deny this favour to an old friend."

The Governor of the prison went out, promising to make the desired application.

As he went out, a priest entered.

Georges held those ideas about religion characteristic of the men of our time, that is to say, while entirely neglecting the outward observances of religion, he was in his inmost heart profoundly impressionable to sacred things. Accordingly, a church, with its "dim religious light," a lonely cemetery, or a passing coffin, produced on his mind a far deeper impression than one of those events which often unhinge the minds of ordinary men.

The priest was one of those venerable old men who do not busy themselves with trying to convince you, but who speak with entire conviction; one of those men who, reared in the midst of the grand scenes of Nature, have sought and found the Almighty in His works; in short, one of those serene hearts who draw suffering hearts to themselves, in order to console them by taking a part of the griefs of others upon themselves.

At the first words which they exchanged, they grasped each other's hands.

It was a confidential talk and not a confession which the aged priest came to obtain from the young man; but, haughty

in the presence of strength, Georges was humble in the presence of weakness. Georges accused himself of pride; like Satan, it was his only fault, and, like Satan, this fault had destroyed him.

But yet, at this very hour, it was this pride which sustained him, which made him strong, which made him great.

It is true that what is great with men is not great with God.

Twenty times the name of Sara was on the young man's lips; but on each occasion he thrust it down to the bottom of his heart,—that gloomy abyss where so many emotions were swallowed up, and whose depths his face concealed, like a coating of ice.

While the priest and the condemned man were talking, the door opened and the Governor of the prison appeared. "The man you asked for is here," he said, "and is waiting until you can receive him."

Georges turned rather pale, and a slight shudder ran through his body; his emotion, however, was scarcely perceptible.

"Admit him," he said.

The priest wanted to withdraw, but Georges restrained him.

"No, stay," said he; "what I have to say to this man can be said before you."

Possibly, this proud soul needed, in order to maintain all his strength, to have a witness of what was going to take place.

A Negro of tall stature and herculean proportions was brought in. He was naked, except for his loin cloth, which was of red stuff; his large, expressionless eyes denoted the absence of all intelligence. He turned to the Governor who brought him in, and, looking first at the priest and then at Georges, asked:

"Which of the two is my man?"

"The young one," answered the Governor of the prison, going out of the cell.

"You are the executioner?" said Georges, coldly and calmly.

"Yes," answered the Negro.

"Good. Come here, my friend, and answer my questions."

The Negro stepped forward.

"You know that you will execute me to-morrow," said Georges.

"Yes," answered the Negro; "at seven in the morning."

"Ah! seven in the morning; thank you



for the information. I had asked to be told the time, but they refused to tell me. However, that is not the question."

The priest felt himself turning faint.

"I have never seen an execution at Port-Louis," said Georges; "but, as I wish things to go properly, I have sent for you, so that we may have what is called, in theatrical language, a rehearsal together."

The Negro was nonplussed; Georges was obliged to explain to him more clearly what he wanted.

Then the Negro took a stool to represent the block, led Georges to the proper distance from the block at which he ought to kneel, showed him how he should place his head upon it, and promised him that he would sever it at one blow.

The old man tried to rise and go out, not having the strength of nerve to endure this strange ordeal in which the two chief actors preserved an equal impassiveness, the one through brutishness of mind, the other by strength of will and courage. But his legs failed him and he sank back in his chair.

The directions for the execution having been given and received, Georges drew a diamond from his finger.

"My friend," said he to the Negro, "as I have no money here, and as I do not wish your time to have been quite wasted, take this ring."

"I am not allowed to take anything from condemned persons," said the Negro; "but I inherit from them; leave the ring on your finger, and to-morrow, when you are dead, I will pull it off."

"Very well!" said Georges.

And without any emotion he replaced the ring on his finger.

The Negro then took his departure; and Georges turned towards the priest, who was as pale as death.

"My son," he said, "I am very happy to have met a spirit like yours. This will be the first time I have ever conducted a condemned man to the scaffold. I was afraid I should give way, but you will support me, will you not?"

"Make your mind easy, Father," answered Georges.

The priest belonged to a small church situated on the road to the place of execution, in which condemned persons usually stopped to hear a last mass. The church was called St. Saviour's.

The priest in his turn left the con-

demned cell, promising to return in the evening; and Georges was left alone.

What then passed within the mind and showed on the countenance of the prisoner, no man knows. It may be, Nature, that pitiless creditor, resumed her rights; it may be, he turned as weak as he had just been strong; it may be, when the curtain had once fallen between the public and the actor, all this apparent impassiveness disappeared to give place to a veritable agony. But in all probability it was not so; for, when the turnkey opened the door to bring Georges his dinner, he found him rolling a cigarette in his hand with as much calmness and tranquillity as a hidalgo on the *Puerta del Sol*, or a fashionable loungeur on the *Boulevard de Gand* could have displayed.

Georges dined as usual; only, he recalled the turnkey to ask him to have a bath ready for him at six next morning, and to awake him at half-past five.

Often, when reading in history or in the newspaper that such and such a condemned man had been awakened on the morning of his execution, Georges had wondered if this condemned man who had to be awaked had been really asleep. The moment had come for him to satisfy himself by his own experience, and on this question Georges was soon to know what to believe.

At nine, the priest came in again. Georges was lying down reading. The priest asked what was the book in which he was thus seeking a preparation for death, whether it was *Plato's Phaedo* or the Bible. Georges held it out to him. It was *Paul and Virginia*.

Strange that, at this terrible moment, it should be this calm and romantic story that the condemned man had chosen!

The priest remained with Georges until eleven. During these two hours Georges did nearly all the talking, explaining to the priest his views of God, and developing his theories on the immortality of the soul. In the ordinary circumstances of life, Georges was eloquent; during this last evening, he was sublime.

It was the condemned man who instructed, and the priest who listened.

At eleven, Georges reminded the priest that the hour for him to go had arrived, and told him that, in order to keep his full strength for the next morning, he would need to take some repose.

As the old man went out, a violent struggle seemed to be taking place within Georges' heart; he called the priest back, but as he returned to the room, Georges made an effort over himself.

"Nothing, Father," he said, "nothing."

Georges lied; once more it was the name of Sara that his mouth strove to utter.

But, yet once more, the old man went out without hearing it uttered.

Next morning when, at half-past five, the turnkey entered his room, he found Georges sleeping soundly.

"It is true then," said Georges on waking, "a condemned man *can* sleep on his last night."

But how long had he lain awake in order to attain this result? No one knows.

The bath was brought in.

At this moment the doctor entered.

"You see, doctor," said he, "I model myself on antiquity; the Athenians used to take a bath before going to fight."

"How are you?" asked the doctor, employing one of those common-place questions which people adopt when they do not know what to say.

"Why, very well, doctor," answered Georges smiling; and I begin to believe that I shall not die of my wound."

Then he took his will, duly sealed, and handed it to him.

"Doctor," he added, "I have appointed you executor under my will. You will find on this piece of paper three lines that concern you; I wanted to leave you a souvenir of myself."

The doctor brushed away a tear and stammered some words of thanks.

Georges got into the bath.

"Doctor," he said after an instant, "how many times should the pulse of a calm and healthy man, in the normal condition, beat during a minute?"

"Why," answered the doctor, "from sixty-four to sixty-six times."

"Feel mine," said Georges; "I am curious to know what effect the approach of death has upon my blood."

The doctor pulled out his watch, took his wrist, and counted the beats.

"Sixty-eight," he said at the end of a minute.

"Come, come," said Georges, "I am quite satisfied. And you, doctor?"

"It is miraculous," he answered; "are you made of iron?"

Georges smiled proudly.

"Ah! you Whites," said he, "you are in a hurry to see me die? I understand it," he added; "perhaps you needed a lesson in courage. I will give it you."

The turnkey entered to tell the condemned man that it was nearly six o'clock.

"My dear doctor," said Georges, "will you let me come out of the bath? Don't go away, however, I should like to shake hands with you before leaving the prison."

The doctor withdrew.

Georges, left alone, came out of the bath, put on white trousers, polished boots, and a cambric shirt of which he turned down the collar himself; after which he went to a small glass and arranged his hair, moustache, and beard with as much care as if he had been going to a ball, or perhaps even more. Then he knocked at the door to intimate that he was ready.

The priest entered and looked at Georges. Never had the young man appeared so handsome: his eyes gleamed, his brow was radiant.

"Oh! my son, my son!" said the priest; "beware of pride; pride has destroyed your body, beware lest it destroy your soul also."

"You will pray for me, Father," said Georges, "and God can refuse nothing, I am sure, to the prayers of a holy man like yourself."

Then Georges noticed the executioner, who was standing in the shadow of the doorway.

"Ah! is it you, my friend?" said he, "come here!"

The Negro was wrapped in a large cloak beneath which he concealed his axe.

"Your axe cuts well?" asked Georges.

"Yes," answered the executioner; "make your mind easy."

"Good!" said the condemned man.

Then he noticed that the Negro was looking at his hand for the diamond which he had promised him the previous evening, and the stone of which was accidentally turned inside.

"Make your mind easy in your turn," said he, turning his stone outwards, "you shall have your ring; besides, to save you the trouble of taking it, here——." And he gave the ring to the priest, indicating by a sign that it was to go to the executioner.



Next he went to a small desk, opened it and took out the two letters which he had written to his father and his brother ; and handed these likewise to the priest.

Once more he appeared to have something to say to him, for he placed his hand on his shoulder, looking earnestly at him, and moved his lips as if about to speak. But yet again his will proved stronger than his feelings, and the name which struggled to escape his breast died on his lips so softly that no one heard it.

At this moment the clock struck six.

"Come," said Georges.

And he went out from the room, followed by the priest and the executioner.

At the foot of the stairs he met the doctor, who was waiting to bid him a last farewell.

Georges held out his hand, and, leaning towards his ear, said to him :

"I bequeath my body to you."

And with these words he stepped into the court-yard.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE CHURCH OF ST. SAUVEUR.

THE gate leading to the street was, as may easily be guessed, thronged with spectators. Such sights are rare at Port-Louis, and every one wished, if not to witness the actual execution, at least to see the condemned man go by.

The Governor of the prison had asked Georges how he would like to be taken to the scaffold. Georges had answered that he preferred to walk, and had obtained this concession as a final act of kindness on the part of Lord Murray.

Eight mounted Artillery men waited for him at the gate. In all the streets through which he would have to pass, English soldiers lined the road on each side, to guard the prisoner and keep back the spectators.

On his appearance, a loud clamour arose ; but, contrary to Georges' expectation, the accent of hatred did not predominate in the sounds that greeted his presence.

The cries were of various import, but mostly expressive of concern and pity,

since the sight of a proud and handsome man face to face with death always exercises a powerful fascination.

Georges walked with a firm step, his head erect, his face calm, in spite of the bitter thoughts which were passing through his mind.

He was thinking of Sara,—of Sara, who had made no attempt to see him, who had not written him a line, who had not given him a souvenir,—of Sara, in whom he had trusted, and to whom he owed his final self-deception.

It is true that, possessed of Sara's love, he would have regretted losing his life ; but the being forgotten by Sara was the last drop of bitterness in his cup.

And then, side by side with the betrayal of his love came the murmur of his wounded pride.

He had miscarried, then, in everything ; his superiority had brought him no profit whatsoever.

The result of this long struggle was the scaffold, to which he was now walking, abandoned by all. When people spoke of him, they would merely say, "The fellow was a crack-brained fool."

As he walked on, continually looking round him, a smile which corresponded well with his thoughts crossed his lips now and then. This smile, outwardly resembling all other smiles, had a bitter source within.

And yet, at every street corner he hoped to see her, he looked for her at every window.

She who had dropped her bouquet in front of him, as he rode in victorious on Antrim, would she not let fall a tear on his path, as he walked defeated to the scaffold ? But nowhere did he see a trace of her.

In this way he walked the whole length of the *Rue de Paris*, then turned to the right towards the Church of St. Sauveur.

The Church was draped with black as if for a funeral, which, indeed, this might be said to be. For what is a condemned man walking to the scaffold, but a living corpse ?

On arriving at the door, Georges gave a start. Beside the good old priest who was waiting beneath the porch, was a woman dressed in black, with a black veil.

This woman in widow's weeds, what was she doing there ? for whom was she waiting ?

In spite of himself, Georges doubled his pace; his eyes were fastened on the woman and he could not remove his gaze from her.

As he set his foot upon the first step of the little Church, the woman herself stepped towards him; Georges cleared the four steps at a bound, raised her veil, uttered a loud cry, and fell at her knees.

It was Sara.

Sara extended her hand with a slow and solemn gesture; a deep silence fell upon the whole crowd.

"Listen," said she, "on the threshold of the Church he is entering, on the threshold of the grave he is about to enter, I call upon you all to witness, in the presence of God and man, that I, Sara de Malmédie, come to ask M. Georges Munier if he is willing to take me for his wife."

"Sara," cried Georges, bursting into sobs, "you are the best, the noblest, the most generous of women!"

Then, rising to his full height, and encircling her with his arm, as though he feared to lose her:

"Come, my widowed wife," he said.

And he drew her into the Church.

If ever victor was proud of his triumph, it was Georges.

In an instant everything was changed for him; Sara, with one word, had placed him above all those men who smiled as they saw him pass. He was no longer a poor madman, unable to obtain the impossible, and dying with his purposes uneffected; but a conqueror smitten in the hour of victory, an Epaminondas, plucking the fatal javelin from his breast, but with his last glance seeing the enemy in flight.

So, by sheer force of will, by the sole influence of his personal worth, he, a Mulatto, had made a white girl love him, and, without his making any advance towards her, without his trying to influence her determination by a word, a letter, a sign, this woman had come to wait for him on his way to the scaffold, and in the face of all men, a thing perhaps unprecedented in the Colony, had chosen him as her husband.

Now, he felt that he could die; that he was rewarded for his long combat. He had fought hand to hand with Prejudice, and Prejudice, while striking Georges a mortal blow, had yet been slain in the struggle.

The brow of Georges was radiant with these thoughts, as he drew Sara into the building: he was no longer a criminal prepared to mount the scaffold, but a martyr ascending to the skies.

Some twenty soldiers lined the aisle of the Church; four soldiers guarded the chancel. Georges passed between them without seeing them, and knelt with Sara before the altar.

The priest began the nuptial mass, but Georges did not listen to his words; he held Sara's hand, and occasionally turned to the crowd and cast on them a look of sovereign contempt.

Then he turned back to Sara, who was pale and almost fainting,—Sara, whose hand he felt trembling within his own, and bestowed on her a look full of gratitude and love, as he suppressed a sigh. He was thinking, he who was on the point of death, what a lifetime it would be, spent with such a woman.

It would have been Heaven! but Heaven is not made for the living.

Meantime the Mass was proceeding, when Georges on turning round saw Miko-Miko, who was doing all that lay in his power, not only by words, but by his gestures, to induce the soldiers who guarded the entrance to the chancel to let him go close to Georges. Devoted as he was to Georges, he wished to see him once more, and to press his hand in gratitude. Georges spoke to the officer in English, and asked that the worthy Chinaman might be allowed to come to him.

There seemed no objection to granting the condemned man this request; so, at a sign from the officer, the soldiers fell back and Miko-Miko hurried into the chancel.

We have seen how Miko-Miko had vowed gratitude to Georges from the first day that he had seen him. This gratitude had made him seek out the prisoner at the Police Station; it now came to display itself for the last time at the foot of the scaffold.

Miko-Miko threw himself at his knees, and Georges held out his hand.

Miko-Miko took the hand between his own and pressed his lips to it; but, at the same time, Georges felt that the Chinaman had slipped a little note between his fingers, and started violently.

The Chinaman, as though he had asked nothing but this last favour, and satisfied



with having obtained it, wanted nothing more, disappeared at once, without uttering a single word.

Georges held the note in his hand and frowned. What could be the meaning of this note? It was, no doubt, of great importance, but Georges did not venture to look at it.

From time to time, seeing Sara so beautiful, so devoted, so detached from all terrestrial love, a grief unspeakable, and such as he had not felt hitherto, seized Georges by the heart and pressed him with an iron grip. In spite of himself, as he thought of the happiness he was losing, he clung to life, and while feeling his soul ready to mount to the skies, felt his heart enchained to earth.

Then he was seized with a terror of dying in despair.

And yet this note which burned in his hand, which he dared not read for fear of its being seen by the soldiers who guarded him, seemed to contain some hope within it, though, in his situation, to hope seemed madness.

He was impatient, however, to read it; although, thanks to the power of self-control which he always exercised, this impatience was betrayed by no outward sign. Only, his clenched hand crushed the note with such force that his nails penetrated the flesh.

Sara was praying.

They came to the consecration. The priest elevated the Host, the chorister rang his bell, and every one knelt.

Georges took advantage of this moment and, kneeling also, opened his hand.

The note contained but one line.

"We are here—Be ready!"

The first sentence was in the handwriting of Jacques; the second in that of Pierre Munier.

At the same moment, and as Georges in his astonishment raised his head, while all the rest were bowed, and looked round him, the door of the sacristy was flung wide open; eight seamen rushed out and seized the four soldiers in the chancel, presenting a pair of daggers at the breast of each. Jacques and Pierre Munier sprang in, Jacques carrying off Sara in his arms, Pierre dragging Georges by the hand. The husband and wife found themselves in the sacristy; the eight seamen entered after them, using the four English soldiers whom they held in front of them as a shield against the blows of their comrades.

Jacques and Pierre closed the door; another door led to the country, and at this door waited two horses ready saddled; they were Antrim and Yambo.

"Mount!" cried Jacques, "mount, both of you, and gallop as hard as you can to the *Baie du Tombeau*!"

"But you and my father!" cried Georges.

"Let them come and take us from my brave seamen," said Jacques, setting Sara in the saddle, while Pierre Munier forced his son to mount.

Then, raising his voice, he shouted:

"Here, my gallant Lascars! here!"

Instantly a hundred and twenty men armed to the teeth appeared running out from the woods of the *Montagne Longue*.

"Off you go!" said Jacques to Sara, "take him, save him—"

"But you?" said Sara.

"We will follow you; don't be uneasy."

"Georges," said Sara, "in the name of Heaven, come!"

And the girl dashed off at a gallop.

"Father!" cried Georges, "father!"

"I will answer for everything, on my life," said Jacques, striking Antrim with the flat of his sword.

And Antrim went off like the wind, carrying his rider with him, who, in less than ten minutes disappeared with Sara behind the Malabar cantonment, while Pierre Munier, Jacques and his seamen, followed them so quickly that, before the English had recovered from their astonishment, the little band was already on the other side of the *Ruisseau des Pucelles*, that is to say, out of gunshot range.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE LEICESTER

TOWARDS five o'clock on the evening of the same day on which the events which we have just related had taken place, the corvette *Calypso* was with nearly all sail set hugging the wind, which, as is usual in those latitudes, was from the East.

In addition to her worthy sailors and Master Tête de Fer, the first Lieutenant,

with whom our readers are acquainted, if not by sight at least by reputation, her crew had been recruited by three other persons, namely, Pierre Munier, Georges, and Sara.

Pierre Munier was walking backwards and forwards on the quarter deck with Jacques. Georges and Sara were seated aft side by side. Georges held Sara's hand in his, and was looking at her, while Sara was looking at the sky.

One must have been placed in the terrible situation from which the two lovers had just escaped to be able to analyse the feeling of supreme happiness and boundless joy which they experienced on finding themselves free on that great Ocean which was carrying them far from the land of their birth, it is true, but from a land which, like a cruel stepmother, had not troubled herself about them, except now and again to persecute them.

Nevertheless, a sigh of pain would escape occasionally from the mouth of the one and make the other start. The heart that has endured long torture does not venture all at once to regain confidence in its happiness.

Still, they were free, with nothing above them but the blue sky, nothing beneath them but the sea, and were flying at their gallant ship's utmost speed from the Isle of France which had almost proved so fatal to them. Pierre and Jacques were chatting, but Georges and Sara did not talk; now and then one would utter the other's name, and that was all.

Pierre Munier stopped occasionally and looked at them with an expression of ineffable delight; the poor old man had suffered so greatly, that he knew not how he had the strength to bear his happiness.

Jacques, who was less sentimental, glanced in the same direction, but it was clear that it was not the picture which we have just described that attracted his attention, for his eyes passed over the heads of Georges and Sara, and searched the horizon in the direction of Port-Louis.

Jacques was not merely below the level of the general joy, but he even at times became anxious, and passed his hand over his brow as if to dispel a cloud.

As for Tête de Fer, he was sitting talking quietly to the man at the wheel. The worthy Breton would have cracked the head of the first man who showed a moment's hesitation in obeying his orders; but, apart from this very natural

requirement, he was not proud, but was hail-fellow-well-met with every one, and talked with the first that came.

All the rest of the crew had resumed that careless expression which becomes habitual to the countenance of seamen, once the battle or the storm is over; the men on duty were on deck, the others below.

Pierre Munier, absorbed as he was in the happiness of Georges and Sara, had not failed, however, to notice Jacques' uneasiness. More than once his eyes had followed the direction in which Jacques was gazing, but, seeing nothing but some great masses of clouds in the West, he concluded that it was they that were causing him this anxiety.

"Are we threatened with a storm?" he asked his son, just as the latter was gazing at the horizon with one of those questioning glances of which we have spoken.

"A storm?" said Jacques. "Ah! my word! if it were only a matter of a storm, the *Calypso* would care no more than does that gull yonder; but we are threatened with something more than that."

"What are we threatened with then?" asked Pierre Munier uneasily. "I thought that, from the moment that we set foot on your ship, we were safe."

"Well!" answered Jacques, "it is a fact that we have more chance of escape now than we had twelve hours ago, when we were hidden in the woods of the *Petite-Montagne*, and when Georges was saying his 'Confiteor' in the Church of St. Sauveur; still, without wishing to make you uneasy, father, I cannot say that our heads are yet firmly fixed on our shoulders."

Then he added, without addressing any one in particular:

"Send a man to the top-gallant yard."

Three sailors at once sprang forward; one of them reached the place indicated in a few seconds; the other two came down again.

"And what are you afraid of, Jacques?" resumed the old man; "do you think they will attempt to pursue us?"

"Exactly, father," replied Jacques, "this time you have hit the mark. They have in Port-Louis a certain frigate called the *Leicester*, an old acquaintance of mine, and I confess that I fear she will not let us get away like this without



proposing a little game of skittles, which we shall be obliged to accept."

"But it seems to me," replied Pierre Munier, "that, in any case, we have at least from twenty-five to thirty miles' start, and that, at the rate we are making, we shall soon be out of sight."

"Heave the log," said Jacques.

Three sailors busied themselves at the same instant with this operation, which Jacques followed with visible interest; then, when it was finished, he asked:

"How many knots?"

"Ten knots, Captain," answered one of the sailors.

"Yes, certainly, that is very good for a corvette keeping close to the wind, and there is, perhaps, in the whole British navy but one frigate that can travel half a knot faster; unfortunately, that frigate is just the one we shall have to tackle, in case the Governor should take into his head to pursue us."

"Oh! if it depends on the Governor, we shall certainly not be pursued," replied Pierre Munier; "you know that the Governor was your brother's friend."

"Certainly; but that did not prevent his allowing him to be condemned to death."

"Could he do otherwise without failing in his duty?"

"This time, father, it is a question of something else than his duty; it is his self-respect which is at stake this time. Yes, no doubt, if the Governor had had the power to do so, he would have pardoned Georges; because to pardon him was to show his own superiority; but Georges has escaped from his hands at the moment when he thought he had got him safe. In these circumstances, then, the superiority has been on the side of Georges, and the Governor will take revenge."

"Sail, ho!" cried the man on the look-out.

"Ah!" said Jacques nodding significantly to his father. "Where away?" he continued, raising his head.

"Under the wind, coming towards us," answered the sailor.

"Where is she off?"

"Off the *Ile des Tonneliers*, or thereabouts."

"Where is she coming from?"

"Coming out of Port-Louis, I should say."

"There we are," murmured Jacques,

looking at his father. "I told you we were not out of their clutches."

"What is it?" asked Sara.

"Nothing," answered Georges; "it seems we are pursued, that is all."

"Oh Heavens!" cried Sara, "have you been given back to me so miraculously only to be taken from me again? It cannot be!"

Jacques meanwhile had taken his telescope and gone into the main-top.

He gazed for some time with great attention in the direction indicated by the look-out man, then, shutting the tubes of the telescope together with his hand, came down whistling, and resumed his place near his father.

"Well?" asked the old man.

"Well," said Jacques, "I was not mistaken, our good friends the English are giving chase. Fortunately," he added, looking at his watch, "in two hours' time it will be quite dark, and the moon does not rise until two hours after midnight."

"Then you think we shall succeed in escaping them?"

"We will do all we can for that end, father, be assured. Oh! I am not proud, I assure you; I have no liking for adventures in which there is nothing to be gained but hard knocks, and, in this particular instance, be hanged if I abandon my prejudices."

"Why, Jacques," cried Georges, "will you flee before the foe, you, the intrepid and undefeated sea-dog!"

"My dear fellow, I shall always run away from the Devil, when his pockets are empty and his horns two inches longer than my own. If his pockets are full, that is a different matter, and I don't mind running some risk."

"But do you realise that they will say you are afraid?"

"And I shall answer that that is true, by God! Besides, what do we gain by coming to blows with those fellows? If they capture us, our goose is cooked; they will string us up to the yards, every man jack of us. If, on the other hand, we capture them, we shall be obliged to sink them, ship and crew."

"What, sink them?"

"Undoubtedly; what do you want us to do with them? If only they were Niggers, we could sell them, but what is the good of Whites?"

"Oh! Jacques, my good brother, you

wouldn't do such a thing as that, would you?"

"Sara, little sister," said Jacques, "we will do what we can; anyhow, when the moment arrives, if it should arrive, we shall put you in a charming little place from which you will not be able to see anything that goes on, and so, as far as you are concerned, it will be as if nothing had happened."

Then, turning in the direction of the ship:

"Yes, yes, there she points; you can see the heads of her top-sails; do you see, there, father?"

"I see nothing but a white point rocking on a wave, and which looks to me just like a gull."

"Well, that is it; your gull is a fine frigate of thirty-six guns. But, you know, the frigate is a bird as well; only, instead of being a swallow, she is an eagle."

"But may it not be some other ship, a merchantman, for instance?"

"A merchantman would not keep close to the wind."

"But we are doing the same."

"Oh! we! that is another matter: we were not able to pass Port-Louis, for that would have been throwing ourselves into the wolf's jaws, and so we had to keep as near as we could."

"Can you not increase the corvette's rate of speed?"

"She is carrying every stitch she can at present, father. When we get the wind behind us we will add a few more bits of canvas and make two knots more; but the frigate will do the same, so it will come to the same thing. The Leicester is bound to gain a mile an hour on us; I know her of old."

"Then she will overtake us to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, unless we escape her during the night."

"And do you think we shall?"

"That depends on what sort of a Captain she has got."

"And supposing she does overtake us?"

"Well, then, father, it will be a matter of boarding, for, you see, an artillery duel is out of the question, so far as we are concerned. In the first place, the Leicester, if it be she, and I would wager a hundred Niggers to ten it is, has something like twelve guns more than we. Besides, she has Bourbon, the Isle of France, or Rodrigue to put into for

repairs; whereas we have but sea, space, immensity, for every land is hostile to us. So we want our wings above all things."

"And if it comes to boarding?"

"Then our chances are improved. In the first place, we possess howitzers, a thing which is not strictly permitted on a man-of-war, but is one of those privileges which we pirates allow ourselves on our own private authority. Next, as the frigate is on a peace establishment, she has probably not more than two hundred and seventy men in her crew, while we have two hundred and sixty, which, you see, especially with fellows like mine, puts things at least on an equality. So make your mind easy, father, and, as the bell is sounding, don't let this prevent us taking our supper."

Indeed, it was now seven in the evening, and the signal for the meal had just been given with its usual punctuality.

Georges gave Sara his arm, Pierre Munier followed them, and all three went down to the Captain's cabin, which had been transformed, in honour of Sara, into a dining-room.

Jacques remained behind for a moment to give some orders to Master Tête-de-Fer, his Lieutenant.

The interior of the Calypso was a curious sight even to a landsman's eye. As a lover adorns his mistress in all possible ways, so Jacques had adorned his corvette with all the embellishments by which a sea nymph can be enriched. The mahogany ladders shone like glass; the copper fittings, polished three times a day, blazed like gold; and all the weapons, axes, sabres, and muskets, arranged in fanciful designs round the port-holes through which the guns protruded their iron muzzles, appeared like ornaments arranged by a clever decorator in the studio of some famous painter.

But the Captain's cabin was especially remarkable for its luxury. Master Jacques was, as we have said, a very sensuous young man, and, like people who, when circumstances demand, can make shift with anything, he loved, in ordinary circumstances, to enjoy everything of the very best. Consequently, his cabin, which was intended to serve at once as a drawing-room, a bed-room, and a boudoir, was a model of its kind.

In the first place, on each side, that is to say, both port and starboard, were



installed two large divans, under which were hidden with their carriages two pieces of ordnance, which were visible only from outside. One of these two divans served as a bed, the other as a sofa; the space between the windows was filled with a handsome Venetian mirror in a rococo frame depicting Cupids surrounded with flowers and fruits. Lastly, from the ceiling was suspended a silver lamp, taken no doubt from the altar of some Madonna, the fine ornamentation of which denoted the best period of the Renaissance. The divans and partitions of the walls were covered with a splendid Indian material with red ground-work, on which meandered those beautiful gold flowers, alike on both sides, which seem as though embroidered by fairy needles.

This room had been made over by Jacques for the joint use of Georges and Sara. However, as the interrupted service at the Church of St. Sauveur did not quite satisfy the girl as to the legality of her marriage, Georges had promptly given her to understand that, if he was admitted to this sanctum during the day, he would find another apartment for the night.

It was in this room, as we have said, that meals were served.

These four persons enjoyed a strange sense of happiness in finding themselves thus united round the same table, after so much apprehension of being separated for ever. They forgot the rest of the world for a time, in thinking only of themselves; forgot the past and the future, in thinking only of the present.

An hour passed like a minute; after which they went up again on deck.

Their first glances were directed astern, looking for the frigate.

There was a moment's silence.

"Why," said Pierre Munier, "the frigate seems to have vanished."

"That is because, the sun being on the horizon, her sails are in shadow," answered Jacques, "but look this way, father."

And the young man pointed with his hand to direct the old man's glance.

"Yes, yes," said Pierre, "now I see her."

"She is even closer than before," said Georges.

"Yes, about a mile or so; here, Georges, if you look you can make out her lower sails; she is not more than fifteen miles from us."

They were at this moment off the channel of the *Cap*, that is to say, they were beginning to leave the Island behind; the sun was setting on the horizon in a bank of clouds, and night was coming on with the rapidity peculiar to tropical latitudes.

Jacques beckoned to Master Tête de Fer, who approached hat in hand.

"Well, Master Tête de Fer," said Jacques, "what are we to think of this vessel?"

"Why, with all due respect, you know more about it than I do, Captain."

"Never mind! I want your opinion. Is she a merchantman or a man-of-war?"

"You are joking, Captain," answered Tête de Fer with his hearty laugh; "you know there isn't, in the whole merchant navy, even in that of the East India Company, a ship that can keep up with us, and this one is overhauling us."

"Ah! and how much has she gained on us since we first saw her, that is to say, in three hours?"

"You know quite well, Captain."

"I want your opinion, Master Tête de Fer; two heads are better than one."

"Why, Captain, she has gained about two miles."

"Very well; and what ship do you suppose her to be?"

"You have recognised her, Captain."

"Perhaps; but I may be mistaken."

"Impossible!" said Tête de Fer, with another laugh.

"Never mind! tell me."

"She is the Leicester, by God!"

"And what ship, think you, is it, she is after tackling?"

"Why, the Calypso, I fancy; you know, Captain, she has an old grudge against us for some trifle of a fore-mast we had the insolence to cut in two."

"Bravo! Master Tête de Fer; I knew all you have just told me; but I am not sorry to see that you agree with me. In five minutes the watch will be changed; make the men off duty take a rest; they will want all their strength in twenty hours or so from now."

"Don't you intend to take advantage of the night and alter your course, Captain?"

"Silence, sir; we will talk of that later. Away with you to your business, and carry out the orders I have given."

Five minutes later, the watch was relieved, and all the men who were not on

duty disappeared below; at the end of ten minutes they were all asleep or pretending to be asleep.

And yet, among all these men, there was not one who did not know that the *Calypso* was being chased; but they knew their Captain and had confidence in him.

Meantime the corvette held on the same course; but she was now beginning to encounter the swell of the open sea, which could not fail to impede her rate of progress. Sara, Georges, and Pierre Munier went down again into the cabin, leaving Jacques alone on deck.

It was now quite dark, and the frigate had disappeared entirely from view. Half an hour passed, at the end of which Jacques again summoned his Lieutenant, who immediately made his appearance.

"Master Tête de Fer," said Jacques, "where do you suppose we are now?"

"North of the *Coin-de-Mire*," answered the Lieutenant.

"Exactly; do you think you could steer the corvette between the *Coin-de-Mire* and the *Ile Plate* without grounding either to right or left?"

"I could take her through blindfolded, Captain."

"Bravo! In that case, tell your men to be in readiness, since there is no time to lose."

Each man ran to his post, and there was a moment of silent expectation.

Then, amid the silence, a voice was heard:

"Ready about!" cried Jacques.

"Belay there! Ready about!" repeated Tête de Fer.

Then the Boatswain's pipe was heard.

The corvette paused for an instant, like a horse pulled up short in his gallop. Then she turned slowly, heeling over under the influence of a fresh breeze and a considerable sea.

"Port your helm!" ordered Jacques.

The steersman obeyed, and the corvette, coming up to the wind, began to forge ahead.

"Keep her away!" was the next order; "ease your sheets!"

These two manœuvres were carried out with the same rapidity and success as the preceding. The corvette fell off; her after-sails filled, while her fore-sails bellied out rapidly in their turn, and the graceful vessel sprang towards the new point of the compass to which she was directed.

"Master Tête de Fer," said Jacques,

after following all the movements of the corvette with the same satisfaction with which a horseman follows the movements of his steed, "you will double the Island, taking advantage of every variation of the breeze, always keeping your luff, and making the best weather you can along the whole belt of rocks from the *Passe des Cornes* to the *Crique de Flac*."

"Aye, aye! sir," answered the Lieutenant.

"And now, good night," resumed Jacques; "and call me when the moon rises."

And Jacques, in his turn, turned in with that happy-go-lucky indifference which is one of the privileges of those who are constantly placed 'twixt life and death.

Ten minutes later he was sleeping as soundly as the rawest of the sailors.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE FIGHT

MASTER Tête de Fer was as good as his word; he passed successfully the narrows between the *Coin-de-Mire* and the *Ile Plate*, and, after doubling the *Passe des Cornes* and the *Ile d'Ambre*, kept as close as possible to the coast.

Then when, half an hour after midnight, he saw the young moon south of the Island of Rodrigue, he went, according to his instructions, to call the Captain.

Jacques on coming on deck examined all points of the horizon with that rapid glance of investigation which belongs essentially to the mariner; the wind had freshened and was shifting from East to North-East; the coast, which looked hazy, lay about nine miles to starboard; no vessel was in sight either ahead, to port, or astern.

The corvette was off Port Bourbon. Jacques had played the best game that he could have played. If the frigate, which had lost sight of him during the night, had continued her course eastwards, it would be too late for her when day broke to return on her tracks, and he was saved; if, on the other hand, the Captain of the pursuing vessel had, by some fatal inspiration, guessed his manœuvre and



followed him, he still had the chance of escaping observation by hugging the coast and profiting by the indentations of the Island coast line to hide from his enemy.

While Jacques was endeavouring with the aid of a night-glass to pierce the gloomy horizon, he felt a hand on his shoulder and, turning round, saw Georges.

"Ah! brother, is it you?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Well," asked Georges, "is there anything fresh?"

"Nothing at present; though if the Leicester were in our wake, we could not see her at the distance which still separates us. At daybreak we shall know all about it. . . . Halloo!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing; a little veering of the wind, that is all."

"In our favour?"

"Yes, if the frigate has kept on her course; if otherwise, this change is as good for her as for us. But in any case, we must make the most of it."

Then, turning to the Boatswain, who had taken the place of the Lieutenant, he said:

"Stand by to hoist the studding-sails."

"Hoist the studding-sails!" repeated the mate.

Instantly you saw ascending from the deck to the top, and then from the top to top-mast, as it were five floating clouds which were set outside the other sails. Almost at the same moment you could feel the corvette answer to a more rapid impulsion. Georges mentioned this to his brother.

"Yes, yes," said Jacques, "she is like Antrim, she has a tender mouth, and you do not need to whip her to make her go. It is only a matter of giving her a suitable amount of canvas, and she will make a spanking pace."

"And how many knots an hour are we going at her present pace?" asked Georges.

"Heave the log!" cried Jacques.

The order was carried out instantaneously.

"How many knots?"

"Eleven, captain."

"That is two knots more than we were making just now. You cannot ask more from wood, and canvas, and iron, and, if we had any other ship at our heels but that demon of a Leicester, I would lead

her as in a leash to the Cape of Good Hope, and then we would bid her good evening."

Georges made no reply, and the two brothers continued to pace the deck in silence; each time, however, that Jacques returned aft, his eyes seemed striving to pierce the darkness. At last he stopped and, instead of continuing his promenade, leaned over the taffrail.

In point of fact, the darkness was beginning to lift, although the first streaks of day still delayed their appearance, and, in the nascent twilight which began to brighten like a fog that disperses to give place to a bluish dawn, Jacques thought he could distinguish, at a distance of about fifteen miles, the frigate holding the same course as the corvette.

At the same moment, and as he was extending his hand to point out to Georges this almost imperceptible dot, the look-out aloft hailed:

"A sail astern!"

"Yes," said Jacques, as though speaking to himself, "yes, I saw it; yes, they have followed our track as though it had remained marked out behind us. Only, instead of passing between the *Ile Plate* and the *Coin-de-Mire*, they have passed between the *Ile Plate* and the *Ile Ronde*, which has lost them two hours. They must have a man on that ship who knows his business."

"But I don't see anything!" said Georges.

"Why look, there, there!" replied Jacques; "you can see as far down as her courses, and, when the ship lifts on the waves, you can see her bows rising like a fish putting its head out of the water to take breath."

"You are right," said Georges; "yes, I can see her."

"What can you see, Georges?" asked a soft voice behind him.

Georges turned and saw Sara.

"What do I see, Sara? Why, a splendid sight, namely, the rising sun. But there is no perfect happiness on earth, and this spectacle is a little spoiled by the sight of that vessel, which, as you see, despite my brother's calculations and hopes, has not lost our track."

"Georges," said Sara, "God, who has so wonderfully brought us together so far, will not fail us now, when we have most need of His care, so do not let this sight prevent you from adoring Him in all His

works. Look, look, Georges, what a grand sight !”

At the moment, indeed, when day was about to break, you might have thought that the night in her jealousy was trying to increase the darkness. A bluish and transparent light had spread over the sky, growing each instant in extent and brightness; then this light gradually dispersed, passing from a silvery white to a delicate pink, and from a delicate pink to a dark rose. Next, a purple cloud, like vapour illuminated by a volcano, rose on the horizon. This heralded the monarch of the world coming to take possession of his empire, the sun blazing forth as a ruler of the firmament.

It was the first time that Sara had seen such a spectacle, and she stood in an ecstasy of delight, clasping her lover's hand with a love full of faith and religion. Georges, however, who during his long sea voyages had had time to grow accustomed to such sights, directed his first glance towards the object of the general anxiety. The pursuing vessel continued to draw nearer, although she was seen less distinctly, bathed as she was in the flood of light in the eastern sky; while, on the other hand, the corvette must now have been clearly visible to the frigate.

“Come,” murmured Jacques, “she has observed us now, for she is setting her studding-sails. Georges, my friend,” he continued, bending down to whisper to his brother, “you know what women are, and that they sometimes find it hard to make up their minds; you would do well, in my opinion, to give a hint to Sara of what is going to happen.”

“What is your brother saying?” asked Sara.

“He doubts your courage,” replied Georges, “and I am answering for you.”

“You are right, my friend. Besides, when the moment comes, you will tell me what I must do, and I will obey.”

“The demon flies as though she had wings!” continued Jacques. “Dear little sister, do you happen to have heard the name of the commander of this ship?”

“I have often seen him at my uncle M. de Malmédie's house, and I remember his name perfectly; it is George Paterson. Still perhaps he is not in command of the Leicester at this moment, for I remember hearing some one say the day before yesterday that he was ill, and, as it was reported, dangerously so.”

“Well, I say that a great injustice will be done to his Lieutenant if he is not appointed Captain in his place on the very day that his superior officer dies. Why, it is a pleasure to have to deal with a fellow like that; see how his ship flies; upon my word, you might call her a race-horse; if this goes on, we shall be obliged in five or six hours to have a brush with her.”

“Well, let us have a brush with her then,” said Pierre Munier, who at this moment came up on deck, and whose eyes, on the approach of danger, gleamed with the ardour which inflamed his soul in great emergencies.

“Ah! father, is it you?” said Jacques. “Delighted to see you in such good fighting trim, for in a few hours, as I was telling you, we shall need every man on board.”

Sara turned slightly pale, and Georges felt her press his hand; he turned to her with a smile.

“Well, Sara,” said he, “after having such confidence in God, will you doubt Him now?”

“No, Georges, no,” replied Sara; “and when, from the bottom of the hold I hear the roar of the guns, the whistling of the bullets, and the cries of the wounded, I shall still remain, I promise you, full of faith and hope, certain of seeing my Georges again safe and sound. For something tells me we have drained the bitter cup of misfortune, and that, as the darkness has been succeeded by this brilliant sun, so will our night yield to a bright day.”

“Hear, hear!” cried Jacques, “that's what I call talking to the purpose. Upon my honour, I don't know how it is that I don't go about and head off this presumptuous ship; that would save us half the trouble and annoyance. What say you, Georges, would you like to make the attempt?”

“Willingly,” said Georges, “but are you not afraid that at this distance, should there be any English vessel in Port Bourbon, she may come out when she hears the cannonade, and help her comrade?”

“Upon my word! you talk as eloquently as St. John of the Golden Mouth, brother, and we will keep on our course. Ah! is it you, Master Tête de Fer?” continued Jacques, addressing his Lieutenant who appeared on deck at that moment. “You come just in time: here we are, as you



see, off Mt. Brabant ; keep her head west-south-west upon the mountain. And now we will have our breakfast, a good precaution to take at any time, but especially so, when you are not sure of getting any dinner."

And Jacques gave his arm to Sara and led the way down, followed by Pierre and Georges.

With the object no doubt of distracting his guests, for the time at least, from the danger that threatened them, Jacques tried to spin out the meal as long as possible, so it was nearly two hours before they went up again on deck.

Jacques' first glance was at the Leicester, which had plainly drawn closer, for her battery could now be seen. Yet Jacques appeared to have expected to find her even closer still; for, throwing a glance aloft to make sure that no change had been made in the sails, he observed :

"Well, what have you been doing, Master Tête de Fer ? It seems to me that we are going rather faster than we were going two hours ago."

"Yes, Captain, yes," answered the Lieutenant, "I should say it is something like that."

"What have you done to the ship ?"

"Oh ! a mere trifle ; I have shifted some weights and ordered the men to go forward."

"Yes, yes, you're a good sailor ; and what have you gained by that ?"

"A knot, Captain, one poor knot, that is all. I have just hove the log, and we are making twelve knots an hour, but that won't help us much, and no doubt the enemy has done the same thing, for he also quickened his pace about a quarter of an hour ago. Look, Captain, you can see almost her entire hull. Oh ! we have to deal with some old sea-dog who will give us a deal of trouble. It puts me in mind of the way in which this same Leicester chased us when Captain Murray commanded her."

"Ah ! by God ! everything is explained now," exclaimed Jacques ; "a thousand pounds to a hundred, Georges, it is your enraged Governor on board that vessel ; he wants to have his revenge."

"Do you think so ?" cried Georges, rising from the bench on which he was sitting, and grasping his brother's arm, "do you think so ? I declare I should be glad if it were he, for I, too, want to take revenge on my own account."

"It is the Governor in person, I will vouch for it now. There isn't another blood-hound who could have followed our track as he has done. What an honour for a humble Slave-Captain like myself to have dealings with a Commodore of the Royal Navy ! Thank you, Georges ! it is you to whom I am indebted for this good fortune."

And Jacques laughingly extended his hand to his brother.

But with Jacques, in the critical situation in which he would soon find himself, the probability of having to deal with Lord Murray himself was only an additional reason for taking all necessary precautions. Jacques examined the ship's sides ; the hammocks were in the nettings ; he examined the crew ; the crew had already instinctively parted into groups, each man standing near the gun which he was to serve. Everything betokened that he had no need to teach these men anything, and that each man knew as well as he did what was to come next.

At this moment a passing breeze bore the sound of the drum beating on the deck of the enemy.

"Ah ! ah !" said Jacques, "they can't be accused of being behindhand. Come, my lads, let us follow their example. The sailors of the Royal Navy are good masters and we shall gain by imitating them."

Then, raising his voice, he gave with all the strength of his lungs the order :

"Clear for action !"

Instantly the roll of two drums accompanied by the shrill notes of a fife was heard in the battery. Presently the three musicians appeared on deck, emerging from a hatchway, marched round the vessel and went back by the hatchway at the opposite end.

The effect of this sight and of the tuneful concert that followed it was magical.

In an instant, every one was at the post appointed beforehand, armed with the light weapons at his disposal ; the top-men sprang aloft with their carbines ; the musketeers took their station on the deck and gangways ; swivels were got ready, the guns were cast loose, and loaded ; supplies of grenades were placed at every spot from which they might be rained down upon the enemy's deck. Finally the Boatswain stoppered all the rigging,

serpentine the stays of the masts, and saw that the boarding nettings were ready for tricing up, and grappling irons handy.

The activity in the interior of the ship was no less great than on deck. The magazines were opened, the lanterns lighted below, the spare stores prepared; lastly, the decks were cleared, and two guns run aft as stern chasers.

Then perfect silence ensued. Jacques saw that everything was ready, and began his inspection.

Every man was at his post and everything in its place.

The inspection, nevertheless, occupied half-an-hour, since Jacques realised that the game he was about to engage in was one of the most serious that he had ever played in his life. During this inspection he examined everything and spoke to each man.

When he returned on deck, the frigate had visibly decreased the distance between them, and only a mile and a half now separated the two ships.

Another half hour passed, during which certainly not ten words were exchanged on board the corvette; all the faculties of crew, officers, and passengers seemed to be concentrated in their eyes.

Each countenance expressed a feeling in harmony with its owner's character; that of Jacques, indifference; of Georges, pride; of Pierre Munier, paternal solicitude; of Sara, devotion.

All of a sudden a light puff of smoke appeared on the frigate's side, and the standard of Great Britain rose majestically into the air.

A fight was now inevitable: the corvette could not haul closer to the wind; and the superiority of the frigate's pace was evident. Jacques gave orders to lower the studding-sails, so as not to have any canvas set that would hamper his manœuvres; then, turning to Sara, he observed:

"Come, little sister, you see that we are all at our posts, and I think it is time for you to go down to yours."

"Oh! great heavens!" cried the girl, "the fight then is inevitable?"

"In a quarter of an hour," said Jacques, "the conversation will begin, and as, in all probability, it will not be lacking in warmth, it is necessary that those who are not to take part in it should retire."

"Sara," said Georges, "don't forget what you promised me."

"Yes, yes," said the girl, "I am ready to obey. You see, Georges, I am reasonable; but you—"

"Sara, you will not ask me, I hope, to remain a spectator of what is going to take place, when so many brave men are exposing their lives only for my sake?"

"Oh! no," said Sara; "I only ask you to think of me, and to remember that if you die, it will kill me."

Then she offered her hand to Jacques, held up her face to Pierre Munier, and conducted by Georges, went down the after-companion ladder.

A quarter of an hour later Georges came up again, holding in his hand a boarding-sword and with a brace of pistols in his belt.

Pierre Munier was armed with his embossed carbine, the trusty friend that had always served him so faithfully.

Jacques was at his place on the quarter deck, holding his speaking-trumpet, the token of authority, in his hand, with a boarding-sword and a small iron morion lying at his feet.

The two ships were pursuing the same course, the frigate still pressing the corvette, and already so close that the sailors in the tops could see what was passing on each other's decks.

"Master Tête de Fer," said Jacques, "you possess good eyes and good judgment, be good enough to go into the mizzen-top and tell me what is going on yonder."

The Lieutenant at once sprang aloft as actively as any common top-man, and in an instant reached the place mentioned.

"Well?" said the Captain.

"Well, Captain, each man is at his post, the gunners at the batteries, the marines at the gangways, and the Captain on the quarter-deck."

"Are there any troops on board besides the sailors and marines?"

"I think not, Captain, unless indeed they are concealed in the battery, for I see the same uniform everywhere."

"Good! In that case the numbers are almost equal, within about fifteen or twenty. That's all I wanted to know. Come down, Master Tête de Fer."

"Wait a moment! The Englishman is putting his trumpet to his mouth; if we are quite still, we may hear what he is going to say."



This last opinion was rather in the nature of a conjecture, for, in spite of the silence on deck, no sound reached the corvette; but the order given by the Captain was none the less clearly explained to the whole crew, for instantly two flashes issued from the bows of the hostile vessel, a report was heard, and two shot ricocheted in the wake of the Calypso.

"Good!" said Jacques; "they have only got eighteen-pounders like ourselves; the chances grow more and more equal."

Then, raising his head, he called to the Lieutenant:

"Come down; you are no use there now, and I want you here."

Master Tête de Fer obeyed, and was by the Captain's side in a moment. Meanwhile the frigate continued to advance, but without firing any more, having found that she was still out of range.

"Master Tête de Fer," said Jacques, "go down into the battery, and, so long as we are running away from them, use round shot; but, the moment we come to boarding, use shells, and nothing but shells. You understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered the Lieutenant.

And he went down the after-ladder.

The two ships continued their course for about half-an-hour without any fresh sign of hostility on the part of the frigate, while the corvette, judging it useless to waste her powder and shot, remained insensible to the two challenges from the enemy. But it was evident, from the animation that began to appear on the sailors' faces, and the care with which the Captain measured the distance which still separated the two vessels, that the conversation, as Jacques had said, would not long be confined to a monologue, and that the dialogue was on the point of beginning.

After waiting for another ten minutes which seemed like an age to everybody, the bows of the frigate burst into flame once more, a double report was heard, followed, this time, by the whistling of shot passing through the rigging, cutting a hole in the mizzen top-sail and carrying away two or three ropes.

Jacques followed with a rapid glance the effect wrought by these two messengers of destruction; then, seeing that the damage was only trifling, he cried:

"Come, my lads, it seems clear that it

is we against whom they bear a grudge. Politeness for politeness. Fire!"

On the instant a double report shook the whole corvette, and Jacques leaned over to watch the effect of his repartee; one of the two shot had struck full in the bows, while the other had buried itself more astern.

"Well!" cried Jacques, "what are the rest of you about? Give her a broadside! aim at her masts; break her legs and clip her wings; masts and sails are more valuable to her at this moment than lives. Ah! look!"

Two balls passed at this moment through the sails and rigging of the corvette, one of which struck the fore yard-arm, and the other carried away the mizzen top-mast.

"Fire! confound you; and take example from those fellows. Twenty-five pounds for the first mast of the frigate that falls."

The report followed the order almost immediately, and you could see the passage of the shot through the sails of the enemy.

For nearly a quarter of an hour the firing continued thus on both sides; the breeze, lulled by the discharges, had almost dropped, and the two ships were moving at scarcely more than four or five knots. The intervening space was so filled with smoke that the gunners fired almost at random; the frigate, however, still came on, and you could see the tops of her masts rising above the smoke that surrounded her, while the corvette, who had the wind behind her and fired from her stern, was quite clear of this inconvenience.

This was the moment for which Jacques was waiting. He had done all he could to avoid boarding; but, being forced in pursuit, was about to turn at last upon his pursuer, like a wounded boar. At this moment the frigate was on the starboard side of the corvette, and began to pound her with the fore-castle guns, while the corvette replied with her stern-guns. Jacques saw the advantage of his position and determined to profit by it.

"All hands on deck for boarding!" he cried.

The men instantly rushed on deck.

"Stand by to take the mainsail off her! Man the after port braces and spanker clewlines! Port your helm! Port! Clew up the mainsail and spanker!"

Scarcely had these successive orders

been carried out than the corvette, obeying the simultaneous action of her helm and her after sails, turned rapidly to starboard, having still sufficient way on her to run athwart the frigate's course, and remained stationary, thanks to the precaution the Captain had taken of hauling taut his fore starboard braces. At the same moment the frigate, deprived of her power of manœuvring owing to the damage to her after sheets, and unable to double the corvette with the wind, came on, ploughing through smoke and sea, and willy nilly ran her bowsprit with a terrific crash into the main-shrouds of the enemy.

At this moment the voice of Jacques rang out for the last time :

"Fire! Rake her fore and aft! Shave them bare as a hulk!"

Fourteen guns, six of them charged with grape and eight with shell, obey this order, sweeping the deck, on which they cut down thirty or forty men, and bringing the mizzen-mast down. At the same instant a shower of grenades descending from the three tops, scours the forward decks of the frigate, which can only reply to this storm of fire and hail of shot from her fore-top, encumbered as it is by the sail.

At this moment the pirates dash forward, rushing headlong and crowding along the yards of the corvette and the bowsprit of the frigate, over the shrouds, the rigging, and the ropes. In vain the marines pour upon them a terrible musketry fire; those who fall are succeeded by others; while the very wounded drag themselves along, pushing grenades before them and waving their arms. Georges and Jacques think that victory is already theirs, when at the order of "All boarders on deck!" the English sailors stationed in the battery rush in their turn up the hatchway and gain the upper deck. This reinforcement steadies the marines, who were beginning to fall back. The Commander of the frigate throws himself at their head. Jacques had not been mistaken; it was indeed the old Captain of the Leicester, who wanted to take his revenge. Georges Munier and Lord Murray meet face to face, but amid blood and slaughter, sword in hand, as mortal foes.

They both recognise and make for one another, but the confusion is such that they are carried along as if by a whirlwind. The two brothers hurry against

the English ranks, dealing and receiving blows, fighting with coolness, and courage; two English sailors raise their axes over the head of Jacques, and both fall, struck by invisible bullets. Pierre Munier is watching over his son, the trusty carbine does its work.

Suddenly a terrible cry, rising above the noise of the grenades, the crackle of the musketry, the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, bursts from the battery, freezing every one with horror.

"Fire! The ship's on fire!" At the same instant a thick smoke issues from the after hatchways and port-holes. One of the shells has exploded in the Captain's cabin and set the frigate on fire.

At this cry, so terrible, so unexpected, all is hushed for a moment; then the voice of Jacques is heard, powerful, imperious, supreme :

"All aboard the Calypso!"

Instantly, with the same speed with which they had descended on to the deck of the frigate, the pirates abandon her, hauling themselves one over the other, clinging on to the rigging, jumping from one deck to the other, while Jacques and Georges, with some of the most resolute of the crew, support the retreat.

Then the Governor dashes forward in his turn, pressing hard on the pirates, firing on them at close range, hoping to board the Calypso at the same time as her crew. But at this the first arrivals spring into the tops of the corvette, and the shower of grenades and bullets begins once more.

Ropes are thrown to those who still remain on the frigate, and each man seizes hold. Jacques leaps back aboard, Georges remains the last. The Governor makes for him, and Georges waits. Suddenly Georges is seized and lifted in a grasp of iron; Pierre Munier is watching over his son, and, for the third time that day, saves him from almost certain death.

Then a voice, overpowering all this horrible confusion, roared: "Man the fore port braces! Hoist the head sails! Clew up the main sail and spanker! Haul in all ropes astern! Starboard your helm!"

All these manœuvres, ordered in that powerful voice which compels obedience, were executed with such marvellous rapidity that, spite of the impetuosity with which the English rushed in pursuit of the pirates, they were not in time to



make the ships fast to one another. The corvette, as though endowed with feeling, seemed to realise the danger she was in, and shook herself free with a vigorous effort, while the frigate, deprived of her mizzen-mast, moved forward slowly, impelled by the sails of her main and fore-mast.

To those on board the *Calypso*, terrible scenes were now visible.

In the heat of the contest the first outbreak of fire on board the frigate had been unperceived, so that when the cry of "Fire" was raised, the conflagration had already made such progress that there was no hope of extinguishing it.

It was at this crisis that the force of British discipline compelled admiration. Amid the smoke, growing denser each moment, the Governor taking his place on the port side of the quarter-deck, and lifting his speaking-trumpet, which he had kept suspended from his left wrist, shouted:

"Steady, men, steady! Trust to me!"

Every one paused.

"Lower the boats!" continued the Governor.

In five minutes the jolly boat at the stern, the two quarter boats at the davits, and one of the gigs, were lowered and alongside the frigate.

"The jolly boat and the gigs for the marines!" sang out the Governor; "the two quarter boats for the Bluejackets!"

Then, as the *Calypso* kept sheering off, she heard no more orders given, but she saw the boats being filled with all those who remained uninjured, while the unhappy men who were wounded, dragging themselves to the gangways, vainly besought their comrades to take them in.

"Lower the two quarter boats!" cried Jacques in his turn, when he saw that the frigate's boats could not hold the whole crew.

And the two quarter boats were lowered

from the davits of the *Calypso* into the water, notwithstanding the strong sea running. Immediately, all who could not find room in the frigate's boats, jumped into the sea and began to swim towards those of the corvette.

The Governor remained on board.

They had tried to persuade him to enter one of the boats, but, unable to save his wounded, he preferred to die with them.

The sea now presented a fearful spectacle.

The frigate's boats were rowing with might and main from the burning vessel; the sailors who had been left behind were swimming towards the corvette's boats.

Motionless amid a whirlwind of smoke, her Commander standing stern and motionless on the quarter deck, the wounded cumbering her deck, the frigate burned on.

It was a sight so terrible that Georges felt the trembling hand of Sara resting on his shoulder, yet did not turn to look at her.

Having reached a certain distance, the boats were resting on their oars.

This is what now happened:—

The smoke grew thicker and thicker; then serpents of flame were seen issuing from the hatchways, and crawling along the masts, devouring the sails and rigging; next the flames burst through the port-holes, and the loaded guns went off as the fire reached them. Then a terrible explosion resounded; the vessel was rent like a crater; a cloud of flame and smoke rose to the sky; finally from this cloud, fragments of masts, yards, and rigging were seen to fall into the boiling sea.

This was the last of the *Leicester*.

"And Lord Murray?" asked the girl.

"If I were not going to live with you, Sara," said Georges turning to her, "upon my honour, I could have wished to die as he has died!"

THE END

ROBIN HOOD  
THE OUTLAW











HIS POSITION WAS BECOMING CRITICAL.

THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

ROBIN HOOD  
THE OUTLAW

NEWLY TRANSLATED BY  
ALFRED ALLINSON

WITH THREE COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
FRANK ADAMS

METHUEN & CO.  
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LONDON

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# ROBIN HOOD THE OUTLAW

## CHAPTER I

IN the early hours of a beautiful day in the month of August, Robin Hood, with a light heart and a song on his lips, was strolling down a narrow glade in Sherwood Forest. Suddenly a strong voice, whose capricious tones evidenced a profound ignorance of the rules of music, took up the amorous ballad Robin Hood was singing.

"By'r Lady!" muttered the young man, listening attentively to the stranger's song, "what an extraordinary thing. Those words are mine own composition, dating from my childhood, and I have never taught them to a soul."

Reflecting thus, Robin glided behind the trunk of a tree, to wait until the traveller had passed. The latter soon appeared. As he came opposite the oak tree at the foot of which Robin was sitting, he stopped and gazed into the depths of the wood.

"Ha! ha!" he said, perceiving through the thicket a magnificent herd of deer, "there are some old acquaintances; let us see whether mine eye is still true and my hand sure. By St. Paul! I shall give myself the pleasure of sending an arrow into yonder lusty fellow pacing along so stately."

Saying which, the stranger took an arrow from his quiver, and, adjusting it to his bow, aimed at the deer, wounding him mortally.

"Well done!" cried a laughing voice; "that was a right clever shot."

The stranger, taken by surprise, turned abruptly.

"Think you so, master?" said he, looking Robin up and down.

"Yea, you are most dexterous."

"Indeed!" added the other in a scornful tone.

"Never a doubt of it, and especially so for one little used to shoot at deer."

"How know you that I am not practised in this exercise?"

"By your fashion of holding the bow. I would wager what you will, Sir Stranger, that you are better versed in overthrowing a man on the field of battle than in stretching out the deer in the green wood."

"Excellently answered," laughed the stranger. "Is it permissible to ask the name of one whose eye is so penetrating as to judge by a single shot the difference betwixt the action of a soldier and that of a forester?"

"My name boots little in the question before us, Sir Stranger, but I can tell you my qualifications. I am one of the chief keepers of this Forest, and I do not intend to allow my helpless deer to be exposed to the attacks of any who take it into their heads to kill them, merely to try their skill."

"I care not much for your intentions, fair keeper," rejoined the stranger in a deliberate tone, "and I defy you to prevent me from shooting mine arrows as best me seemeth. I will kill the deer, I will kill the fawns, I will kill what I please."

"That will be easy, an if I do not oppose you, because you are a right good bowman," Robin replied. "And now I will make you a proposition. Hear me! I am chief of a band of men, stout-hearted, clear-witted, and well skilled in all the exercises of their trade. You seem to me a good fellow: if your heart be honest, if you be of a calm and conciliatory spirit, I shall be happy to enroll you in my company. Once you are one of us, you may hunt the deer; but if you refuse to join our brotherhood, I must ask you to quit the Forest."

"Truly, master keeper, you speak in a mighty overbearing tone. Come now, hear me in your turn. If you do not speedily show me your heels, I will give you such counsel as—with no grand phrases—will teach you to weigh your



words; which counsel, pretty bird, will be a volley of blows from a cudgel plied pretty briskly."

"You beat me!" cried Robin, scornfully.

"Yea, I!"

"My lad," replied Robin, "I would fain not lose my temper, for thou wouldst find it would go ill with thee then; but if thou dost not at once obey my order to quit the Forest, thou wilt be first vigorously chastised; thereafter we will e'en try the compass of thy neck and the strength of thy body on the highest branch of a tree in this Forest."

The stranger began to laugh.

"Beat me and hang me," said he; "that would be curious, if it were not impossible. Let us see, then. Get to work; I am waiting."

"I do not trouble myself to cudgel with mine own hands all the rogues I encounter, my friend," returned Robin. "I have those who fill that useful office in my name. I will summon them, and thou canst explain thyself to them."

Robin raised a horn to his lips, and was about to sound a vigorous call, when the stranger, who had quickly fitted an arrow to his bow, shouted—

"Hold, or I kill you!"

Robin dropped his horn, seized his bow, and leaping towards the stranger with incredible nimbleness, cried—

"Madman! Dost not see with what a power thou wouldst strive? Before thou couldst strike me, I should have already smitten thee, and the death thou wouldst aim at me would have recoiled upon thyself. Be reasonable; we are strangers to each other, and for no good cause we treat each other as enemies. The bow is a murderous weapon: replace the arrow in thy quiver, and, since thou wilt play with the quarter-staff, so be it. I accept thy challenge."

"The quarter-staff then!" repeated the stranger; "and let him who is able to knock the other on the head, be not only the victor, but also free to rule the fate of his adversary."

"So be it," Robin returned. "Take heed of the consequences of the compact thou proposest; if I make thee cry for mercy, I shall have the right of enrolling thee in my band."

"Agreed!"

"Very well; and may the best man win the day."

"Amen!" said the stranger.

The trial of strength commenced. The blows, liberally administered on both sides, soon overwhelmed the stranger, who did not succeed in hitting Robin once. Indignant and breathless, the poor youth flung down his weapon.

"Cease!" he cried. "I have had enough of this."

"You own yourself beaten?" asked Robin.

"No; but I see you are much stronger than I am. You are accustomed to wield a cudgel, which gives you too great an advantage; the match should be as equal as possible. Can you use a sword?"

"Yea," replied Robin.

"Will you continue the struggle with that weapon?"

"Certainly."

They drew their swords. Each was an expert swordsman, and when they had fought for a quarter of an hour, neither had succeeded in wounding the other.

"Stop!" cried Robin, suddenly.

"You are tired?" asked the stranger, with a smile of triumph.

"Yea," Robin replied frankly; "since to me the sword is not a pleasant weapon. The quarter-staff is the thing; its blows are less dangerous and offer some sport; the sword hath something savage and cruel about it. My fatigue, though real," Robin went on, scrutinising the face of the stranger, whose head was covered by a cap which partly concealed his forehead, "is not my sole reason for seeking a truce. Since I have stood facing thee, memories of my childhood have surged up within me; the look of thy large blue eyes is not unfamiliar to me. Thy voice recalls that of a friend, my heart is irresistibly attracted towards thee. Tell me thy name; if thou art he whom I love and long for with all the yearning of a tender friendship, thou art welcome a thousand times. I will love thee for thyself and for the dear memories thou dost recall."

"You speak with a goodnature which attracts me, Sir Forester," replied the stranger, "but, to my great sorrow, I cannot grant your reasonable request. I am not at liberty to do so; my name is a secret which prudence counsels me to guard with care."

"You have nothing to fear from me," replied Robin; "I am one of those whom men call outlaws. Moreover, I am incapable of betraying the confidence of

one who trusts me, and I despise the baseness of him who would reveal even a secret involuntarily surprised. Tell me your name?"

The stranger still hesitated.

"I will be your friend," added Robin, with an air of frankness.

"Agreed," replied the stranger. "I am called William Gamwell."

Robin uttered a cry.

"Will, Will—merry Will Scarlett?"

"Yea."

"And I am Robin Hood!"

"Robin!" cried the young man, as he fell into the arms of his friend; "what joy!"

The two young men embraced each other heartily; then, with looks of unspeakable delight, they gazed at each other with an affecting wonder.

"And I threatened thee!" said Will.

"And I did not recognise thee!" added Robin.

"I wished to kill thee!" cried Will.

"And I cudgelled thee!" continued Robin, breaking into a laugh.

"Bah! think no more of that. Give me news quick of . . . Maude."

"Maude is well, very well."

"Is she . . .?"

"Always a charming girl, who loves thee, Will, and only thee in all the world. She hath kept her heart for thee; she will give thee her hand. She hath mourned thy absence, the dear creature; thou hast suffered much, my poor Will, but thou wilt be happy, if thou dost still love the good and beautiful Maude."

"If I love her! How can you question it, Robin? Ah! yes, I love her, and God bless her for not having forgotten me! I have never ceased thinking of her for a single moment; her dear image was ever in my heart, and gave it strength. It was the courage of the soldier on the field of battle, and the consolation of the prisoner in the dark dungeon of the State prison. Maude, dear Robin, hath been my thought, my dream, my hope, my future. Through her I have been able to bear the most cruel privations, the most grievous hardships. God implanted in my heart an unshakeable confidence in the future. I felt sure of seeing Maude again, of becoming her husband, and of spending the last years of my life with her."

"That patient hope is on the point of being fulfilled, dear Will," said Robin.

"Yea, I trust so, or rather, I am certain of it. To prove to thee, friend Robin, how much I thought of the dear child, I will tell thee a dream I had in Normandy—a dream which lingers still in my thoughts, though it dates back nearly a month. I was in the depths of a prison, my arms bound, my body loaded with chains, and I saw Maude a few paces from me, pale as death and covered with blood. The poor girl held out supplicating hands toward me, and her mouth, with its blood-stained lips, murmured plaintive words, the sense of which I could not comprehend, but I saw that she suffered cruelly and was calling me to her aid. As I have just said, I was bound with chains. I rolled upon the ground, and in my helplessness I bit the iron bands which gripped my arms; in a word, I made superhuman efforts to drag myself to Maude. Suddenly the chains which entwined me slackened gently, then fell off. I leapt to my feet and ran to Maude. I took the poor bleeding girl to my heart; I covered with burning kisses her wan, white cheeks, and little by little the blood, arrested in its course, began to circulate, slowly at first, then regularly and naturally. Maude's lips gained colour, she opened her great black eyes, and cast upon my face a look, at once so grateful and so tender that I was touched to the quick; my heart leapt within me, and a deep groan escaped my burning bosom. I suffered, but at the same time I was very happy. Awakening soon followed this deep emotion, and I leapt from my bed with the firm resolution of returning to England. I longed to see Maude again—Maude who must be unhappy—Maude who must be in need of me. I went at once to my Captain; he had been my father's steward, and I thought I had some interest with him. To him I disclosed, not the reason of my desire to return to England, for he would have laughed at my fears, but the desire alone. He refused harshly to give me leave. This first rebuff did not deter me. I was like a man possessed, mad to see Maude once more. I besought this man to whom I had once given orders; I entreated him to grant my wish. You will pity me, Robin," added Will, blushing; "no matter, I will tell you all. I threw myself on my knees before him; my weakness made him smile, and, with a brutal kick, he threw me on my back. Then, Robin,



I rose. I was wearing my sword; I drew it from its scabbard, and, without hesitation or reflection, I slew the wretch. Ever since I have been pursued, but I hope my trail is lost. That is why, dear Robin, taking you for a stranger, I would not give you my name; but thank Heaven for leading me to you! Now tell me about Maude; does she still live at Gamwell Hall?"

"At Gamwell Hall, my dear Will?" repeated Robin. "Then thou dost not know what hath happened?"

"I know nothing. But what *hath* happened? Thou dost frighten me!"

"Nay! never be uneasy; the trouble which befell thy family hath been partly repaired. Time and resignation have effaced all traces of a painful deed; Gamwell village and Hall have both been destroyed."

"Destroyed!" cried Will. "Holy Virgin! And my mother, Robin; my father and my poor sisters?"

"Are all safe and sound; do not be alarmed! Thy family are now living at Barnsdale. Later on I will tell thee the fatal story in detail; for the present let it suffice that this cruel destruction, which was the work of the Normans, hath cost them dear. We killed two-thirds of the troops sent by King Henry."

"By King Henry!" exclaimed William. Then he added hesitatingly, "Thou art, thou sayest, Robin, chief keeper of the Forest, and naturally in the service of the King."

"Not quite, fair cousin," returned the young man, with a smile. "It is the Normans who pay me for my supervision—at least, those who are rich, for I take naught from the poor. I am indeed keeper of the Forest, but on my own account and that of my jolly companions. In a word, William, I am lord of Sherwood Forest, and I will maintain my rights and privileges against all pretenders."

"I do not understand thee, Robin," said Will, in utter amazement.

"I will explain myself more clearly." Saying which, Robin lifted his horn to his lips and blew three piercing blasts.

Scarce had the depths of the wood been stirred by the strident notes, ere William saw issue from brake and glade, to right and left, a hundred men all clad alike in a neat garb, whose green colour well became their martial forms.

These men, armed with bows and

arrows, shields and short swords, ranged themselves silently around their leader. William stared in amaze, and looked at Robin with an air of stupefaction. The young man amused himself for a moment in watching the astonishment and surprise his cousin displayed at the respectful attitude of the men summoned by the blast of his horn, then, laying a muscular hand on Will's shoulder, he said laughingly—

"My lads, here is a man who made me cry mercy in an encounter with swords."

"*He!*" cried the men, examining Will with marked curiosity.

"Yea, he beat me; and I am proud of his victory, for he hath a sure hand and a brave heart."

Little John, who seemed less delighted by William's prowess than Robin had been, advanced to the middle of the circle, and said to the young man—

"Stranger, if thou hast made the valiant Robin Hood ask for quarter, thou must be of superlative strength; natheless, it shall not be said that thou hast had the glory of beating the chief of the merry foresters without having been thrashed by his lieutenant. I am a good hand with the quarter-staff—wilt play me? If thou canst make me cry, 'Hold, enough!' I will proclaim thee the best blade in all the country side."

"My good Little John," said Robin, "I wager a quiver of arrows against a bow of yew that this brave lad will be victor once again."

"I take the double stake, master," replied John; "and if the stranger bears off the prize, he shall be known not only as the best blade, but as the most skillful cudgel-player in all merry England beside."

On hearing Robin Hood address the tall swarthy young man before him as "Little John," Will felt his heart beat quickly, though he showed no emotion. He composed his face, pulled down the cap which covered his head on to his brows, and, answering with a smile the signals Robin was making him, he saluted his adversary gravely, and, armed with his quarter-staff, awaited the first onslaught.

"What! Little John," cried Will, as the young man was about to begin the contest, "wouldst fight with Will Scarlett—with 'merry William,' as thou wast wont to call him?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Little John,

as he let fall his quarter-staff. "That voice! That look!"

He took a few steps forward, and, staggering, leant on Robin's shoulder for support.

"Well! that voice is mine, Cousin John," cried Will, throwing his cap on the grass; "look at me!"

The long red locks of the young man clustered in silky curls around his cheeks, and Little John, after gazing in silent joy at the laughing face of his cousin, threw himself upon him, clipping him fairly in his arms, as he said, with an expression of unutterable tenderness—

"Welcome to merry England, Will, dear Will; welcome to the land of thy fathers—thou who, by thy return, bringest it happiness and content. To-morrow the inhabitants of Barnsdale will make merry; to-morrow their arms will be around him they believed lost for ever. The hour which brings thee back to us is an hour blessed of Heaven, beloved Will; and I am glad to . . . to . . . see thee again. Thou must not think that because thou seest tears on my face, that I am chicken-hearted, Will. No, no; I am not weeping—I am happy, very happy."

Poor John could say no more; he clasped Will convulsively in his arms and continued to weep silently.

William shared in the affecting delight of his cousin, and Robin Hood left them for a moment in each other's arms.

Their first emotion calmed, Little John gave Will, as briefly as possible, the details of the frightful catastrophe which had driven his family from Gamwell Hall. The tale finished, Robin and John conducted Will to the different hiding-places which the band had made for themselves in the Forest, and, at the young man's request, he was enrolled in the troop with the title of lieutenant, which placed him in the same rank as Little John.

Next morning, Will expressed a wish to go to Barnsdale. Robin perfectly understood this very natural desire, and he at once prepared to accompany the young man, as did Little John also. For two days previously Will's brothers had been at Barnsdale, preparing a feast to celebrate Sir Guy's birthday, and by William's return this would be made a scene of great rejoicings.

After giving some orders to his men,

Robin Hood and his two friends took the road to Mansfield, where they would find horses. They started blithely on their way, Robin singing pretty ballads in his true and tuneful voice, while Will, intoxicated with joy, danced along beside him, taking up at random the refrain of his songs. Little John even ventured on a wrong note sometimes, whereat Will shouted with laughter, and Robin joined in his mirth. If a stranger had seen our friends, he would certainly have taken them for the guests of a too-generous host, so true is it that intoxication of the heart can resemble closely the intoxication of wine.

At a short distance from Mansfield their high spirits received a sudden check. Three men in the garb of foresters emerged from behind a group of trees and placed themselves across the road, as if determined to bar their way.

Robin Hood and his companions stopped for an instant. Then the young man scrutinised the strangers, and asked imperiously—

"Who are ye, and what do ye here?"

"I was just about to put the same questions," replied one of the three men, a sturdy, square-shouldered fellow, who, armed with quarter-staff and dagger, seemed quite prepared to stand any attack.

"Verily?" replied Robin. "Ah, well! I am very glad to have spared you the trouble; for had you permitted yourself to ask me anything so impertinent, it is probable that I might have responded in such fashion as to make you regret your audacity for ever and a day."

"Thou speakest proudly, my lad," replied the Forester, in a mocking tone.

"Less proudly than I should have acted, had you been so impertinent as to question me; I do not reply, I question. Therefore I ask, for the last time, who are ye, and what are ye doing here? One would think, by your haughty mien, that Sherwood Forest belonged to you."

"God be praised, my lad, but thou hast a good tongue. Ah! thou dost me the favour of promising me a thrashing, if I question thee in turn? 'Tis bravely boasted! Now, jovial stranger, I am about to give thee a lesson in courtesy and to reply to thy request. That done, I will make known to thee how I chastise fools and impudent rascals."

"Done!" returned Robin, gaily. "Tell



me thy name and title; then beat me, an thou canst; I should like it."

"I am the keeper of this part of the Forest; my rights of supervision extend from Mansfield as far as a wide cross-road about seven miles from hence. These two men are my assistants. I hold my commission from King Henry, and by his orders I protect the deer against ruffians like you. Dost take me, sirrah?"

"Perfectly; but if you are keeper of the Forest, what am I and my companions? Up to this present I was thought to be the only man possessing the rights of that title. True it is, I do not hold them by the kindness of King Henry, but entirely of my own will, which is all-powerful here, because it is called the right of the strongest."

"Thou the chief keeper of Sherwood Forest!" replied the Forester, scornfully. "Thou art joking; art a common rogue and vagabond—no less."

"My good friend," Robin returned quickly, "you seek to overawe me with your own importance; but you are not the keeper whose name you are attempting to assume. I know the man it belongeth to of rights."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the keeper; "canst tell me his name?"

"Certainly. He is called John Cockle, the fat miller of Mansfield."

"I am his son, and bear the name of Much."

"You are Much? I do not believe it."

"He speaks truly," put in Little John. "I know him by sight. He hath been pointed out to me as one well skilled in handling a cudgel."

"Thou hast not been misinformed, forester, and, if thou knowest me, I can say the same of thee. Hast a face and figure 'tis impossible to forget."

"You know my name?" queried the young man.

"Yea, master John."

"As for me, I am Robin Hood, Keeper Much."

"I suspected as much, my good fellow, and I am delighted to meet thee. A handsome reward is offered to him who can lay hands on thy person. I am naturally ambitious, and the reward, which is for a large amount, would be quite to my taste. To-day I have the opportunity of catching thee, and I do not mean to let it escape me."

"You are quite right, gallows purveyor,"

replied Robin, in a tone of contempt. "Come, off with your jacket, draw your sword. I am your man."

"Stop!" cried Little John. "Much is more expert in handling a cudgel than in drawing a sword; let us fight all against all. I will take Much; Robin and you, William, take the others, and 'twill be an equal match."

"Done," replied the keeper, "for it shall never be said that Much, the miller of Mansfield's son, ran away from Robin Hood and his merry men."

"Well answered," cried Robin. "Come, Little John, take Much, as you wish to have him for your foe; and I will take this lusty rascal. Art willing to fight me?" Robin asked the man whom chance had given him as opponent.

"Right willing, brave outlaw."

"To work, then, and may the Holy Mother of God give the victory to them that deserve her aid."

"Amen," said Little John. "The Holy Virgin doth never desert the helpless in the hour of need."

"She doth forsake no one," said Much.

"No one," said Robin, making the sign of the cross.

Preparations for the contest being cheerfully completed, Little John cried aloud:—

"Begin!"

"Begin!" repeated Will and Robin.

An old ballad, which has preserved the memory of this combat, describes it thus:—

"Robin and Will and Little John  
Had fought from eight till noon,  
All on a lovely summer day  
In the leafy month of June,  
And never gave the foemen chance  
To injure them with sword or lance."

"Little John," panted Much, after asking for quarter, "I had long heard tell of thy skill and gallantry, and I desired to match myself against thee. I have had my wish; thou hast beaten me, and thy victory will teach me a salutary lesson in modesty. I considered myself a worthy adversary, and thou hast e'en taught me I am but a blundering fool."

"Thou art an excellent jousting friend Much," replied Little John, shaking the hand held out to him by the keeper, "and well deservest thy reputation for valour."

"I thank thee for thy compliment, forester," returned Much, "but I consider it more polite than sincere. Thou supposest, perhaps, that my vanity would suffer under an unexpected defeat, but thou mayest undeceive thyself; I am not mortified at having been beaten by a man of thy worth."

"Bravely spoken, valiant miller's son!" cried Robin, cheerily. "Thou givest proof that thou dost possess the most enviable of all riches—a good heart and a Saxon soul. Only an honest man would accept cheerfully and without the least bitterness a wound to his self-esteem. Give me thy hand, Much, and forgive the name that I called thee when thou madest me the confidant of thy covetous ambition. I did not recognise thee, and my slight was directed not at thy person but at thy words. Wilt take a glass of Rhine wine? We will drink to our lucky meeting and future friendship."

"Here is my hand, Robin Hood; I offer it with all my heart. I have often heard thy praises sung; I know that thou art a noble outlaw, and that thou dost extend a generous protection to the poor. Thou art even the friend of those that should hate thee worst, thine enemies the Normans. They speak of thee with esteem, and I have never heard any one seriously blame thine actions. Thou hast been stripped of thy possessions; thou hast been banished; honest men should hold thee dear, because misfortune hath been a guest in thy home."

"I thank thee for those words, friend Much; I will not forget them, and I hope that thou wilt give me the pleasure of thy company as far as Mansfield."

"I am with thee, Robin," replied Much.

"And I too," said the man who had fought with Robin.

"I say the same," added Will's adversary.

Arm in arm they took their way together toward the town, laughing and conversing as they went.

"My dear Much," asked Robin, as they entered Mansfield, "are thy friends discreet?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because their silence is necessary for my security. As thou mayst well believe, I am here disguised; and if my presence at a Mansfield inn were to be made known by an indiscreet word, the dwelling of mine host would promptly be

surrounded by soldiers, and I should be obliged to fight or fly, neither of which would suit me to-day. I am expected in Yorkshire, and I want not to delay my departure."

"I can answer for the discretion of my comrades. As to mine own, how canst doubt it? but I think, good Robin, thou dost exaggerate the danger; the curiosity of the citizens of Mansfield is the only thing to fear. They will dog thy steps, so anxious are they to see with their own eyes the celebrated Robin Hood, the hero of all the ballads the maidens sing."

"The poor outlaw, you mean to say, Master Much," replied the young man, bitterly. "Fear not to call me so; the shame of that name falls not on me, but rather on the head of him who pronounced a sentence as cruel as it was unjust."

"Very good, my friend; but whatever the name added to thine own, they love and respect it."

Robin wrung the honest fellow's hand.

Without attracting any attention, they reached an inn a little way out of the town, and installed themselves at a table, which the host quickly covered with half a dozen long-necked bottles full of that good Rhine wine which loosens the tongue and opens the heart.

The bottles succeeded each other rapidly, and the conversation became so unrestrained and confidential that Much experienced a wish to prolong it indefinitely. Consequently he proposed to join Robin Hood's band; and his companions, enchanted by the delightful descriptions of a life of freedom under the great trees of Sherwood Forest, followed the example of their leader, and engaged themselves with heart and lip to follow Robin Hood. He accepted the flattering offer made to him, and Much, who wished to start at once, asked his new chief for permission to bid his family good-bye. Little John was to await his return, conduct the three men to the hiding-place in the Forest, instal them there, and once more take the road to Barnsdale, where he would find William and Robin. These several arrangements concluded, the conversation took another turn.

Some minutes before the hour of their departure from the inn, two men entered the room in which they sat. The first of the men glanced rapidly at Robin Hood, looked at little John, then fixed his attention on Will Scarlett. This attention was



so intense and so tenacious that the young man noticed it himself, and he was about to question the new-comer, when the latter, perceiving that he had roused a feeling of uneasiness in the young man's mind, turned away his eyes, swallowed a glass of wine at a gulp, and left the room with his companion.

Entirely absorbed in the delight caused by the hope of seeing Maude before nightfall, Will neglected to inform his companions of what had occurred, and mounted horse and rode away with Robin Hood without giving it another thought. As they went on their way, the two friends concocted a plan for Will's entry into the castle.

Robin wished to appear there alone, and prepare the family for Will's return; but the impatient youth would not allow this.

"My dear Robin," said he, "do not leave me alone; my emotion is such that it would be impossible for me to remain silent and tranquil a few steps from my father's house. I am so much altered, and my face bears such visible traces of a hard life, that it is not to be feared my mother will recognise me at a first glance. Present me as a stranger—as a friend of Will's; I shall thus have the happiness of seeing my dear parents the sooner, and of making myself known when they have been prepared for my arrival."

Robin acceded to Will's wishes, and the two young men presented themselves at Barnsdale Castle together.

The whole family was assembled in the hall. Robin was received with open arms, and the Knight extended to the stranger—as he took him to be—a cordial and affectionate hospitality.

Winifred and Barbara seated themselves near Robin, and overwhelmed him with questions, for he was usually an echo of the news of the outer world to the young girls.

The absence of Maude and Marian put Robin at his ease, and after answering his cousins' questions, he rose and said, turning to Sir Guy—

"Uncle, I have good news for you—news which will make you very happy."

"Your visit alone is a great joy to my old heart, Robin Hood," replied the old man.

"Robin Hood is a messenger from heaven," cried pretty Barbara, shaking her clustering blonde tresses coquettishly.

"At my next visit, fair Barbara," Robin returned gaily, "I will be a messenger of love, for I will e'en bring you a husband."

"And I will welcome him right gladly, Robin," replied the girl, laughing merrily.

"You will do well, cousin, for he will be worthy of your kindest welcome. I will not draw his portrait, but will content myself with saying that, so soon as ever your pretty eyes light upon him, you will say to Winifred, 'There, sister, there is the right man for Barbara Gamwell.'"

"Are you quite sure of that, Robin?"

"Perfectly sure, little witch."

"Well, to decide that, we must know all about the matter, Robin. Though you might not think it, I am very particular, and the young man will have to be *very* nice to please me."

"What do you mean by 'very nice'?"

"Like you, cousin."

"Little flatterer!"

"I say what I think, and I cannot help it, if you call it flattery. And I do not only require my husband to be as handsome as you are, but he must have your good heart too and kindly ways."

"You approve of me, then, Barbara?"

"Certainly; you suit me exactly."

"I am both pained and pleased to have such luck, cousin mine; but, alas! if you are nourishing the secret hope of winning me, allow me to lament your folly. I am already pledged, Barbara—pledged to two people."

"I know those two people, Robin."

"Really, cousin?"

"Yea, an if I liked to name them."

"Ah! I beseech you not to betray my secret, Mistress Barbara."

"Never fear, I will spare your blushes. But to return to me, dear Robin; I consent, if you will graciously grant me this favour, to be the third of your lady-loves, or even the fourth, for I presume that there are at least three other damosels awaiting the felicity of bearing your illustrious name."

"You little scoffer," said the young man, laughing, "you do not deserve the affection I feel for you. Nevertheless, I will keep my promise, and within a few days I will bring you a charming young man."

"If your friend be not young, lively, and handsome, I will have never a word to say to him, Robin; remember that."

"He is all that you could wish for."

"Very well; now let us hear the news that you were on the point of telling my

father, ere you bethought you to offer me a husband."

"Mistress Barbara, I was about to tell my uncle, my aunt, and you too, dear Winifred, that I had news of some one very dear to your hearts."

"Of my brother Will?" said Barbara.

"Yea, cousin."

"Ah, what joy! Well?"

"Well, that young man who is looking at you so shyly, delighted as he is to be in the presence of so charming a girl, saw William only a few days ago."

"Is my boy well?" asked Sir Guy, in trembling tones.

"Is he happy?" questioned Lady Gamwell, clasping her hands.

"Where is he?" added Winifred.

"Why does he stay away from us?" said Barbara, fixing her eyes, which were full of tears, upon the face of Robin's companion.

Poor William was unable to speak a word for the lump in his throat and the beating of his heart. A minute's silence followed these searching questions. Barbara continued to gaze pensively at the young man, then suddenly she uttered a cry, threw herself upon the stranger, putting her arms around him, as she sobbed out—

"It is Will, it is Will! I know him! Dear Will, how glad I am to see you!"

And dropping her head upon her brother's shoulder, she began to weep convulsively.

Lady Gamwell, her sons, and Winifred and Barbara, pressed round the young man, while Sir Guy, though he tried to appear calm, sank into an armchair and wept like a child.

Will's young brothers seemed intoxicated with joy. After giving vent to a terrific hurrah! they picked William up in their strong arms and hugged him until he was nearly stifled.

Robin took advantage of the general attention being taken off himself to leave the room, and went to look for Maude. Mistress Lindsay was in very delicate health, requiring the greatest care, so that it might have been dangerous to announce William's return too suddenly to her.

As he crossed the apartment adjoining Maude's, Robin met Marian.

"What is a-foot in the Castle, Robin dear?" asked the girl, when her lover's

tender greeting was over. "Just now I heard what methought were shouts of joy."

"And so they were, dear Marian, to celebrate the return of one ardently longed for."

"Whose return?" asked the girl, tremulously—"not my brother's?"

"Alas! no, dear Marian," returned Robin, taking the girl's hand; "as yet God hath not sent Allan back to us; but Will—you remember Will Scarlett, merry William?"

"Of course I do, and I am right glad to hear that he is back again safe and sound. Where is he?"

"With his mother; when I left the hall his brothers were fighting to embrace him. I am looking for Maude."

"She is in her room. Shall I tell her to come down?"

"No, I must go to her, for the poor child must be prepared for William's visit. My mission is not easy to fulfil," Robin went on with a laugh, "for the labyrinths of Sherwood Forest are much better known to me than the mysterious recesses of a woman's heart."

"Why so modest, Master Robin?" replied Marian, gaily. "You know better than any one how to set about fathoming a woman's heart."

"Really, Marian, I do believe that my cousins, you and Maude, are all in league to try and make me vain; you vie with one another in showering compliments upon me."

"There is no doubt about it, Master Robin," said Marian, shaking her finger at the young man. "You lay yourself out to make Winifred and Barbara fond of you. What? you are trying to break your little cousins' hearts? Very well, then, I am delighted to hear it, and I will in my turn try the effect of my eyes on handsome Will Scarlett."

"I give my consent, dear Marian, but I warn you that you will have a dangerous rival. Maude is devotedly loved, she will defend her own honour; and poor Will will blush sorely when he finds himself betwixt two such charming women."

"If William cannot blush better than you do, Robin, I need not be afraid of causing him that embarrassing emotion."

"Hah! hah!" laughed Robin, "you mean, Mistress Marian, that I know not how to blush?"



"Nay! I mean that you have forgotten how, which is quite a different matter. Once upon a time, I remember, a brilliant scarlet tinted your cheeks."

"When did that memorable event take place?"

"The day when first we met in Sherwood Forest."

"May I tell you why I blushed, Marian?"

"I am afraid to say yea, Robin, for I see a twinkle in your eye and the outline of a wicked smile on your lips."

"You dread my reply, but at the same time you await it impatiently, Marian."

"Not at all."

"That's a pity, for I thought I should please you by divulging the secret of my first and last blush."

"You always please me when you talk about yourself, Robin," said Marian, with a smile.

"That day when I had the happiness of taking you to my father's house, I had the greatest desire to behold your face, which was hidden within the folds of a great hood, leaving visible only the limpid brightness of your eyes. Walking shyly beside you, I said to myself, 'If yonder wench's face be as sweet as her eyes, I will e'en be her lover.'"

"What, Robin, at sixteen you dreamt of making a woman love you?"

"I did i'faith; and just as I was contemplating devoting my whole life to you, your adorable face, shaking off the sombre veil which had hidden it from mine eyes, appeared in all its radiant splendour. So ardently did I gaze upon you that your cheeks became suffused with blushes. Something within me cried, 'This maid shall be thy wife.' The blood which had rushed to my heart mounted to my face, and I felt that I must love you. There, dear Marian, that is the story of my first and last blush. Since that day," Robin went on after a moment of affecting silence, "this hope, heaven-born promise of a happy future, hath been the consolation and support of mine existence. I hope and I believe."

Sounds of merriment from the Great Hall below reached the room above, where hand-in-hand the two young people continued to exchange tender whispered confidences.

"Quick, dear Robin," said Marian, pressing her lovely forehead to the young man's lips, "go to Maude; I must go to

welcome Will, and tell him that you are with his betrothed."

Robin soon reached Maude's room, and found the girl within.

"I felt almost sure I heard the shouts of joy which announced your arrival, dear Robin," she said, as she offered him a seat. "Excuse me for not having come down to the withdrawing room, but I feel ill at ease and almost an intruder amongst the general rejoicings."

"How is that, Maude?"

"Because I am the only one for whom you never have any good news."

"Your turn will come, dear Maude."

"I have lost courage, Robin, and I am filled with a feeling of deadly sadness. I like you with all my heart, I am very glad to see you, and yet I give you no proof of my affection, nor do I convey to you how agreeable your presence is; sometimes, dear Robin, I even try to avoid you."

"To avoid me?" cried the young man, in a tone of surprise.

"Yea, Robin, for when I hear you giving Sir Guy news of his sons, or giving a message from Little John to Winifred, or one from her brothers to Barbara, I say to myself, 'I am alway forgotten; I am the only one to whom Robin never brings anything.'"

"Never anything, Maude?"

"Oh, I am not speaking of the charming presents which you bring, and a very large proportion of which you always give to your sister Maude, thinking thus to compensate her for the lack of news. Your kind heart wishes to console me, dear Robin, but alas! I cannot be comforted."

"You are a naughty little girl," said Robin, in a bantering tone. "What, do you complain that you never receive from any one tokens of friendship or remembrance? Ungrateful girl, do I not bring you news from Nottingham at each of my visits? Who was it, who, at the risk of losing his head, paid frequent visits to your brother Hal? Who, at the still greater risk of losing his heart, exposed himself bravely to the murderous fire of two beautiful eyes? In order to please you, Maude, I brave the danger of a *tête-à-tête* with the lovely Grace, I submit to the charms of her gracious smile, I suffer the touch of her pretty hand, I even kiss her beautiful brow; and for whom, I ask you, do I thus endanger my peace of mind? For you, Maude, and for you alone."

Maude began to laugh.

"I must indeed be of an ungrateful nature," said she, "for the pleasure I feel in hearing you speak of Halbert and his wife doth not satisfy the desire of my heart."

"Very well, then, Madam, I will not tell you that I saw Hal last week, that he charged me to kiss you on both cheeks; nor will I tell you that Grace loves you with all her heart, and that her little daughter Maude—an angel of goodness—wishes her pretty godmother a very good day."

"Thank you a thousand times, dear Robin, for your charming manner of telling me nothing. I am quite content to remain thus in ignorance of what is happening at Nottingham; but, by the way, have you told Marian of the attention you paid to Halbert's charming wife?"

"What a spiteful question, Maude! Well, to give you a proof my conscience hath naught to reproach itself withal, I will tell you that I have confided to Marian but a small part of my appreciation of the charms of the beautiful Grace. However, as I have a great admiration for her eyes, I was very careful not to be too expansive upon the subject."

"What! you deceived Marian? It would serve you right were I to go at once and reveal to her the full extent of your wickedness."

"We will go together presently, and I will offer you my arm; but before we go to Marian, I wish to talk to you."

"What have you to tell me, Robin?"

"Something very nice, and which, I am sure, will give you great pleasure."

"Then you have news of . . . of . . ."

And the young girl looked at Robin with questioning eyes and an expression of mingled doubt, hope, and joy, while the blood rushed into her face.

"Of whom, Maude?"

"Ah! you are teasing me," said the poor girl, sadly.

"No, dear little friend, I really have something very good to tell you."

"Tell me quick, then."

"What do you think of a husband?" asked Robin.

"A husband? What a strange question!"

"Not at all, if that husband were . . ."

"Will! Will! You have heard news of Will! For mercy's sake, Robin, never

play with my heart; it beats with such violence as to pain me. I am listening. Speak, Robin; is dear William sound and well?"

"Without a doubt, since he wishes to call you his dear little wife at the earliest possible moment."

"You have seen him? Where is he? When will he be here?"

"I have seen him; he will soon come."

"Holy Mother of God, I thank thee!" cried Maude, clasping her hands and raising her tearful eyes to heaven. "How glad I shall be to see him!" added the girl. "But . . ." continued Maude, as her eyes turned irresistibly towards the door, on the threshold of which stood a young man, "it is he! it is he!"

Maude, with a cry of intense delight, threw herself into William's arms and swooned away.

"Poor dear girl!" murmured the young man, in a trembling voice, "the emotion hath been too much for her, too sudden; she hath fainted. Robin, hold her up a little; I am weak as a child, I can hardly stand."

Robin took Maude gently from William's arms and carried her to a couch. As for poor William, with his head hidden in his hands, he wept bitterly. Maude soon came to herself, and her first thought was for Will, her first look for him. He knelt at her feet, and, putting his arms round her waist, murmured tenderly the name of his beloved—

"Maude! Maude!"

"William! dear William!"

"I want to speak to Marian," said Robin, smiling. "Good-bye; I will leave you together. Do not quite forget others who love you."

Maude held out her hand to the young man, and William looked gratefully at him.

"Here I am, back at last, dear Maude," said Will. "Are you glad to see me?"

"How can you ask, William? Oh yes, I am glad, and, more than that, I am happy, very happy."

"You don't want me to go away again?"

"Did I ever want you to?"

"No; but it depends on you alone whether I stay here for good or only as a visitor."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember the last conversation we had together?"



"Yea, William dear."

"I left you with a heavy heart that day, dear Maude; I was in despair. Robin noticed my distress, and, urged by his inquiries, I told him everything. I thus learned the name of him you once loved. . . ."

"Do not let us speak of my girlish follies," interrupted Maude, twining her arms round William's neck; "the past belongs to God."

"Yea, dear Maude, to God alone, and the present to us, is it not so?"

"Yea, to us and to God. Perhaps it might be as well for your peace of mind, dear William," added the young girl, "to have a clear, frank, and decided idea of my relations with Robin Hood."

"I know as much as I desire to know, dear Maude; Robin told me all that had passed betwixt you."

A delicate pink flooded the girl's face.

"If your departure had been less hurried," she replied, hiding her blushing face on the young man's shoulder, "you would have learnt that, deeply touched by the patient tenderness of your love, I longed to return it. During your absence I got into the habit of regarding Robin as a brother, and to-day I ask myself, Will, if my heart ever beat for any one but you."

"Then it is quite true that you love me a little, Maude?" said William, clasping his hands, and with tears in his eyes.

"A little! No; but very much."

"Oh, Maude, how happy you make me! You see, I was right to hope, to wait, to be patient, to say to myself, 'The day will come when I shall be loved.' We are going to be married, are we not?"

"Dear Will!"

"Say yea, or say, rather, 'I want to marry my good William.'"

"'I want to marry my good William,' " repeated the girl, obediently.

"Give me your hand, dear Maude."

"Here it is."

William kissed the little hand of his betrothed passionately.

"When shall our wedding be, Maude?" he asked.

"I do not know, my dear—some day."

"Of course, but it must be settled; suppose we say to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Will! You don't mean it; 'tis impossible."

"Impossible! Why impossible?"

"Because it is too unexpected, too soon."

"Happiness never comes too soon, dear Maude; and could we be married at this very moment, I should be the happiest of men. As we must wait until to-morrow, why, I resign myself to it. But it is settled, is it not, that to-morrow you will be my wife?"

"To-morrow!" cried the girl.

"Yea; and for two reasons, the first being that we shall keep my father's seventy-sixth birthday, the second that my mother wishes to celebrate my return with great rejoicings. The merrymaking would be quite complete, if still further brightened by the accomplishment of our mutual desires."

"Your family, dear William, are not prepared to receive me as one of their number, and your father would perhaps say . . ."

"My father," interrupted Will—"my father will say that you are an angel, that he loves you, and that you have long been his daughter. Ah, Maude! you do not know the good and kind old man, if you doubt his joy at the happiness of his son."

"You have such a gift of persuasion, my dear Will, that I agree with you entirely."

"Then you consent, Maude?"

"I suppose I must, dear Will."

"You are not forced to do so, Madam."

"Really, William, you are very difficult to please; probably you would prefer to hear me reply, 'I consent with all my heart.'"

"To marry you to-morrow," added Will.

"'To marry you to-morrow,' " repeated Maude, laughing.

"Very well; I am content. Come, dear little woman, let us go and announce our approaching marriage to our friends."

William took Maude's arm, drew it through his own, and, kissing the girl, he led her towards the Great Hall, where the whole family was still assembled.

Lady Gamwell and her husband gave Maude their blessing, Winifred and Barbara greeted her by the sweet name of sister, and Will's brothers embraced her enthusiastically.

The preparations for the wedding now occupied the ladies, who, all animated by the same desire of ministering to the happiness of Will and to the beauty of

Maude, set themselves at once to make a charming dress for the young girl.

The morrow came slowly, as do all impatiently expected to-morrows. From early morning the courtyard of the Castle had been furnished with innumerable casks of ale, which, festooned with garlands of leaves, were to wait patiently until their presence was discovered. A splendid banquet was in preparation, armfuls of flowers strewed the halls, the musicians tuned their instruments, and the expected guests came thronging in.

The hour fixed for the celebration of the wedding of Mistress Lindsay and William Gamwell was about to strike; Maude, dressed with exquisite taste, awaited William's arrival in the Great Hall, but William did not come.

Sir Guy sent a servant to look for his son.

The servant looked all over the pleasure-ground, searched the Castle, called the young man, and got no reply, save the echo of his own voice.

Robin Hood and Sir Guy's sons mounted their horses and searched the neighbourhood; they could find no trace of the bridegroom, nor hear any tidings of him.

The guests divided into parties, and explored the country in other directions, but their search was equally futile.

At midnight, the whole family gathered round Maude, who had been unconscious for the last hour.

William had disappeared.

## CHAPTER II

AS we have already mentioned, Baron Fitz-Alwine had brought his beautiful and charming daughter, the Lady Christabel, back with him to Nottingham Castle.

Some days before the disappearance of poor Will, the Baron was sitting in one of his apartments opposite to a little man, splendidly dressed in a robe laden with golden embroidery.

If it were possible to be rich in ugliness, one would have said that Lord Fitz-Alwine's guest was immensely rich.

Judging by his face, this old beau should have been much older than the Baron, but he did not seem to recall the antiquity of his birth himself.

With wrinkled and grimacing faces, like two old monkeys, the men talked together in low voices, and it was evident that they were trying to obtain from one another, by dint of cunning and flattery, a definite conclusion to some important business.

"You are too hard on me, Baron," said the hideous old man, wagging his head.

"Faith, no," replied Lord Fitz-Alwine, briskly. "I wish to secure my daughter's happiness, that is all, and I challenge you to discover any ulterior motive in me, my dear Sir Tristan."

"I know that you are a good father, Fitz-Alwine, and that the happiness of the Lady Christabel is your only thought. . . . And what dowry intend you to give this dear child?"

"I have told you already, five thousand pieces of gold on her wedding day, and the same amount later."

"The date must be stated precisely, Baron; the date must be precisely stated," grumbled the old man.

"Let us say in five years, then."

"The delay is long, and the dowry you give your daughter is very small."

"Sir Tristan," said the Baron, dryly, "you put my patience to too great a trial. I pray you to remember that my daughter is young and beautiful, and that you yourself no longer possess the physical advantages you may have had fifty years ago."

"There, there, don't get angry, Fitz-Alwine; my intentions are good. I can place a million beside your ten thousand pieces of gold. What am I saying? One million, probably two."

"I know you are rich," interrupted the Baron. "Unhappily, I am not on a level with you there, and yet I would fain place my daughter in the rank of the greatest ladies in Europe. I want the Lady Christabel's position to be equal to that of a queen. You are aware of this paternal desire, and yet you refuse to entrust me with the money necessary to realise it."

"I cannot understand, my dear Fitz-Alwine, what difference it can make to the happiness of your daughter, and I keep the half of my fortune in mine own hands. I will settle the income of a million, of two millions even, on the Lady Christabel, but I must retain the control of the capital. Do not distress yourself, my wife shall lead the life of a queen."



"That is all very well, in words, my dear Sir Tristan; but permit me to remind you that when there is a great disparity in the ages of husband and wife, misunderstanding is apt to be their guest. It might happen that the caprices of a young woman would become unbearable to you, and you would take back what you had given. If I kept half your fortune in mine own hands, I should be satisfied as to the future happiness of my daughter; she would have nothing to fear, and you might e'en quarrel with her to your heart's content."

"Quarrel? You are joking, my dear Baron; never could such a misfortune occur. I am too fond of the pretty little dove to wish to annoy her. For twelve years I have aspired to the honour of her hand, and yet you think me capable of reproving her caprices; she may have as many as e'er she please, for she will be rich and able to satisfy them."

"Permit me to remark that, if you still refuse to accede to my demands, I shall distinctly retract the promise I have given you."

"You are too hasty, Baron, much too hasty," grumbled the old man. "Let us discuss the matter a little longer."

"I have already said all there is to say; I have come to a decision."

"Do not be obstinate, Fitz-Alwine. What if I were to place fifty thousand pieces of gold in your hands?"

"I should ask whether you intended to insult me."

"To insult you, Fitz-Alwine? What a poor opinion you must have of me! If I said two hundred thousand pieces of gold?"

"Sir Tristan, this must end. I know your immense fortune, and the offer you make me is a mere mockery. What am I to do with your two hundred thousand pieces of gold?"

"Did I say two hundred thousand, Baron? I meant to say five hundred thousand—five hundred, do you understand? Now, isn't that a noble sum, a very noble sum?"

"True," replied the Baron, "but you have just told me that you could lay two million beside my daughter's ten thousand pieces of gold. Give me one million, and my Christabel shall be your wife to-morrow if you wish it, my dear Sir Tristan."

"A million! You want me to give you a million, Fitz-Alwine! Truly your

demand is absurd. I cannot in conscience place half my fortune in your hands."

"Do you doubt my honour and good faith?" cried the Baron, irritably.

"Not in the least, my good friend."

"Do you imagine that I have any motive other than my daughter's happiness?"

"I know that you love the Lady Christabel, but . . ."

"But what?" thundered the Baron. "Decide quickly, or I annul for ever the promises I have made."

"You do not give me time for reflection."

At this moment a serving-man knocked softly at the door.

"Come in," said the Baron.

"My Lord," said the man, "a messenger from the King hath brought urgent news, and awaits your Lordship's good pleasure to announce them."

"Bring him hither," replied the Baron. "Now, Sir Tristan, one last word. If you do not accede to my wishes before the entry of the messenger, who will be here in two minutes, you shall not have the Lady Christabel."

"Hear me, Fitz-Alwine, pray hear me."

"I will hear nothing. My daughter is worth a million; besides, you told me that you loved her."

"Tenderly, very tenderly," mumbled the hideous old man.

"Well, then, Sir Tristan, you will be very unhappy, for you are about to be separated from her for ever. I know a young lord, as noble as a king, rich, very rich, and good-looking, who only awaits my permission to lay his name and fortune at my daughter's feet. If you hesitate a second longer, to-morrow—note well, *to-morrow*—the maiden you love, my daughter, the beautiful and charming Christabel, will be the wife of your more fortunate rival."

"You are pitiless, Fitz-Alwine!"

"I hear the messenger. Answer yes or no."

"But, Fitz-Alwine . . ."

"Yea or nay?"

"Yea, yea," stammered the old man.

"Sir Tristan, my good friend, only think of your happiness; my daughter is a treasure of grace and beauty."

"It is true she is very beautiful," said the amorous old man.

"And that she is worth a million pieces

of gold," added the Baron, with a sneer. "Sir Tristan, she is yours."

Thus did Baron Fitz-Alwine sell his daughter, the beautiful Lady Christabel, to Sir Tristan Goldsborough for a million pieces of gold.

As soon as he was announced, the messenger informed the Baron that a soldier who had killed the captain of his regiment had been pursued as far as Nottinghamshire. The King's orders to Baron Fitz-Alwine were to have this soldier seized and hanged without mercy.

The messenger dismissed, Lord Fitz-Alwine wrung the trembling hands of his daughter's future husband, excusing himself for leaving him at this happy moment, but the King's commands were peremptory, and must be obeyed without the least delay.

Three days after this most honourable bargain had been struck between the Baron and Sir Tristan, the fugitive soldier was taken prisoner and thrown into a dungeon of Nottingham Castle.

Robin Hood still continued an active search for William, who was, alas! the poor soldier seized by the Baron's men.

In despair at the ill success of his investigations throughout the county of Yorkshire, Robin Hood sought the Forest once more, hoping to hear something from his followers, who, posted on the roads leading from Mansfield to Nottingham, might perchance have discovered some traces of the young man.

About a mile from Mansfield, Robin Hood met Much, the miller's son, who, mounted like himself on a spirited horse, was galloping at full speed in the direction from which Robin had just come.

On seeing his young leader, Much uttered a cry of joy, and drew rein.

"How glad I am to meet you, friend!" said he. "I was going to Barnsdale. I have news of the lad who was with you the first time we met."

"Have you, indeed? We have been seeking him these three days past."

"I have seen him."

"When?"

"Last evening."

"Where?"

"At Mansfield, whither I returned, after spending eight and forty hours with my new companions. As I drew near my father's house, I perceived at the door a troop of horse, on one of which sat a young man with his arms

tightly bound. In him I recognised your friend. The soldiers, who were refreshing themselves, had left their prisoner guarded by the cords which bound him to the horse. Without attracting their attention, I was able to convey to the poor lad that I would at once hasten to Barnsdale and inform you of the misfortune which had overtaken him. This promise revived the courage of your friend, and he thanked me with an expressive look. Without losing a moment I called for a horse, and as I mounted asked a soldier some questions as to the fate in store for their prisoner; he replied that by order of Baron Fitz-Alwine they were taking the young man to Nottingham Castle."

"I thank you for the trouble you have taken to help me, my good Much," replied Robin. "You have just told me everything I wanted to know, and we shall be unlucky indeed and we do not succeed in preventing the cruel intentions of his Norman Lordship. To horse, good Much. Let us hasten to the heart of the Forest; there I will take measures for a successful expedition."

"Where is Little John?" asked Much.

"He is making his way to our retreat by another road; by separating, we each hoped to obtain news. Fortune hath favoured me, since I had the luck to meet you, brave Much."

"The luck is on my side," replied Much, cheerily; "my actions are governed by your will alone."

Robin smilingly acknowledged the compliment, then set off at a gallop, followed closely by his companion.

On arriving at the general rendezvous, Robin and Much found Little John already there. After giving the latter the news Much had brought, Robin ordered him to assemble the men scattered through the Forest, form them into one troop, and take them to the verge of the wood near Nottingham Castle. There, concealed in the covert of the trees, they were to await a summons from Robin, and hold themselves ready to fight. These arrangements concluded, Robin and Much mounted again, and set off at full gallop on the way to Nottingham.

"Friend," said Robin, when they had reached the edge of the Forest, "here we are at the end of our journey. I must not enter Nottingham; my presence in the town would be known at once, and its motive (which I wish to conceal)



discovered. You understand, don't you? If William's enemies became aware of my sudden appearance, they would be on their guard, and, in consequence, it would be more difficult for us to set our friend at liberty. You must go alone into the town, and then make your way to a cottage lying on the outskirts of the place. There you will find a good friend of mine, by name Halbert Lindsay; in the event of his absence, his comely wife, who well deserves her pretty name of Grace, will tell you where to find him. You will seek him out and bring him to me. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then go! I will stay here to keep a look-out."

Left alone, Robin hid his horse in the thicket, stretched himself beneath the shade of an oak, and set to work to devise a plan of campaign for poor Will's successful deliverance. While bringing all his inventive faculties to bear upon this subject, the young man kept a careful watch on the road.

Presently he saw in the distance a richly dressed young knight approaching the Forest from the direction of Nottingham.

"By my faith!" said Robin to himself, "if this gay traveller is of Norman blood, he does well to choose this direction for his country walk. Dame Fortune appears to have treated him so kindly, that it will be a pleasure to relieve his pockets of the price of the bows and arrows which will be broken to-morrow in William's honour. His habit is sumptuous, his gait haughty; of a truth, this gallant is well met. Come along, my fine gentleman, you will be all the lighter when we have become acquainted."

Rising quickly from his recumbent position, Robin placed himself in the traveller's way. The latter, expecting, doubtless, some token of politeness, stopped courteously.

"Welcome, Sir Knight," said Robin, putting his hand to his cap. "The sky is so dark that I took your glorious appearance for a messenger from the sun. Your smiling countenance brightens the landscape, and if you would remain a few minutes longer on the verge of the old Forest, the very flowers hidden beneath its shade would take you for a ray of light."

The stranger laughed gaily.

"Do you belong to Robin Hood's band?" he asked.

"You judge by appearances, Sir," replied the young man, "and because you see me clothed in the garb of the foresters, you presume that I must belong to Robin Hood's band. You are wrong. All the inhabitants of the Forest do not follow the fortunes of the Outlaw Chief."

"That's like enow," returned the stranger, in a tone of manifest impatience. "I thought I had met a member of the company of Merrie Men. I was wrong, that is all."

The traveller's reply excited Robin's curiosity.

"Master," said he, "your countenance betokens a hearty frankness, which, despite the profound hatred I have borne against the Normans these many years past . . ."

"I am no Norman, Sir Forester," interrupted the traveller, "and I might imitate you in saying that you, too, judge by appearances. My dress and the accent of my speech lead you into error. I am Saxon, though there are a few drops of Norman blood in my veins."

"A Saxon is a brother to me, Master, and I am happy to be able to give you a proof of my confidence. I do belong to Robin Hood's band. As you are doubtless aware, we use a less disinterested fashion of making ourselves known to Norman travellers."

"I know that fashion, at once courteous and productive," replied the stranger, laughingly. "I have often heard of it, and I am on my way to Sherwood solely that I may have the pleasure of meeting your leader."

"And what if I were to tell you that you were now in the presence of Robin Hood?"

"I would offer him my hand," replied the stranger, quickly, accompanying the words with a friendly gesture. "And I would say to him, 'Friend Robin, have you forgotten Marian's brother?'"

"Allan Clare! You are Allan Clare!" exclaimed Robin, gleefully.

"Yea, I am Allan Clare. And the recollection of your expressive countenance, my dear Robin, was so deep graven on my heart that I recognised you at the first glance."

"How glad I am to see you, Allan!" replied Robin Hood, shaking the young man by both hands. "Marian doth not

expect the happiness which your return to England will give her."

"My poor dear sister!" said Allan, with an expression of deep tenderness. "Is she well? Is she happy?"

"Her health is perfect, Allan, and she hath no other sorrow than that of being separated from you."

"I have returned, never to quit my native land again. My good sister will then be quite happy. Did you hear, Robin, that I was in the service of the King of France?"

"Yea. One of the Baron's men, and the Baron himself in a burst of confidence produced by fear, made known to us your position about the King's person."

"A lucky chance enabled me to render the King of France a great service," continued the Knight, "and in his gratitude he deigned to acquaint himself with my desires, and took a great and friendly interest in me. His Majesty's kindness emboldened me, and I made known my troubles to him. I told him how my goods had been confiscated, and I besought him to allow me to return to England. The King was so gracious as to grant my prayer; he gave me a letter to King Henry on the spot, and, without losing a moment, I started for this country. At the request of the King of France, Henry II. restored to me my father's property; and the King's Treasury will have to give me back in good golden crowns the revenue produced by mine estates since their confiscation. Beside which, I have realised a large sum, which, once placed in the hands of Baron Fitz-Alwine, is to win me the hand of my dear Christabel."

"I have heard of the bargain," said Robin. "The seven years given you by the Baron are on the point of expiring, are they not?"

"Yea. To-morrow is my last day of grace."

"Well, then, you had best hasten to see the Baron, for the delay of an hour would be your loss."

"How did you learn of the existence of this contract and its conditions?"

"From my cousin, Little John."

"Sir Guy of Gamwell's gigantic nephew?" asked Allan.

"The very same; then you remember the worthy fellow?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, he is now bigger than ever, and

stronger even than he is tall. It was from him that I learnt of your arrangement with the Baron."

"Lord Fitz-Alwine took him into his confidence, then?" said Allan, with a smile.

"Yea, Little John threatened his Lordship, and interrogated him at the point of the dagger."

"Then I can quite comprehend the Baron's expansiveness."

"My good friend," replied Robin, gravely, "beware of Lord Fitz-Alwine. He bears you no love, and if he can find a means of breaking his oath, he will not hesitate to do so."

"Should he attempt to dispute with me over Lady Christabel's hand, I swear to you, Robin, I will make him repent it bitterly."

"Have you any especial means of making the Baron fear your threats?"

"Yea; and beside, were I unable to obtain the fulfilment of his promise, I would lay siege to the Castle sooner than give up my Christabel."

"An you want help, I am entirely at your service, good Allan; I can immediately place at your disposal two hundred men, fleet of foot and strong of arm. They are equally well skilled in the use of bow, sword, lance and buckler; say but one word, and at my command they will be with us."

"A thousand thanks, dear Robin. I expected no less from your good friendship."

"And you were right; but tell me how learned you that I dwelt in Sherwood Forest?"

"Having concluded my business in London," replied the Knight, "I came to Nottingham. There I heard of the Baron's return, and of Christabel's presence at the Castle. Being assured of the existence of my beloved, I repaired to Gamwell. Imagine my astonishment on entering the village and finding only the ruins of the good Knight's noble dwelling. I returned to Mansfield with all haste, and an inhabitant of that town told me what had occurred. He sang your praises to me, and informed me that the Gamwell family had retired secretly to their Yorkshire lands. Tell me of my sister Marian, Robin Hood; is she much changed?"

"Yes, Allan, she is indeed changed."

"My poor sister!"

"She is of a perfect beauty now,"



continued Robin, laughing, "for each spring hath added to her graces."

"Is she married?" asked Allan.

"Nay, not yet."

"So much the better. Do you know if she hath given her heart to any one, or if her hand is promised?"

"Marian shall answer that question," said Robin, blushing slightly. "How hot it is to-day!" he added, passing his hand over his flushed brow. "Do let us go into the shade of the trees; I am expecting one of my men, and meseemeth his absence is unduly prolonged. By the way, Allan, do you recall one of the sons of Sir Guy—William, surnamed Scarlett, by reason of the something vivid hue of his locks?"

"A well-favoured lad with large blue eyes?"

"The same. The poor fellow, sent to London by Baron Fitz-Alwine, had been enrolled in a regiment that formed part of the army which still occupies Normandy. One fine day William was taken with an unconquerable desire to see his family again; he asked for leave, which he could not obtain, and, beside himself at the persistent refusal of his Captain, he killed him. Will succeeded in reaching England, a lucky chance brought us together, and I took the lad to Barnsdale, where his family live. The day after his return all the household were rejoicing, for they were not only celebrating the return of the wanderer, but also his marriage and Sir Guy's birthday."

"Will going to be married? To whom?"

"To a charming damosel whom you know—Mistress Lindsay."

"I do not recollect the lady you name."

"What, you have forgotten the existence of the companion, friend, and devoted follower of the Lady Christabel?"

"I know, I know," returned Allan Clare. "You are speaking of the merry daughter of the Keeper of Nottingham, of the sprightly Maude?"

"That's it; Maude and William have loved each other for a long time."

"Maude loved Will Scarlett! What are you saying, Robin? It was you, my friend, who had won the girl's heart."

"Nay, nay, you are mistaken."

"Not at all, not at all; I remember now that, if she did not love you, which I doubt, at least she took a deep and tender interest in you."

"I had then, and have still, a brotherly affection for her."

"Really?" questioned the Knight, slyly.

"On my honour, yea!" replied Robin.

"But to finish William's story. This is what happened to him. An hour before the celebration of his marriage, he disappeared, and I have just learnt that he hath been carried off by the Baron's soldiers. I have collected my men—in a few minutes they will be within call—and I am relying on my skill, supported by their aid, to deliver William."

"Where is he?"

"Without the least doubt he is in Nottingham Castle. I shall soon be certain of it."

"Do not be too rash, my good Robin; wait till to-morrow. I shall see the Baron, and I will bring to bear all the influence which entreaties or threats can have on him to obtain the release of your cousin."

"But if the old miscreant acts summarily, should I not all my life regret having lost several hours?"

"Have you reason to fear it?"

"How can you ask me such a question, Allan, when you know the cruel answer to it better than I do myself? You know well, do you not, that Lord Fitz-Alwine is without pity and without feeling? If he dared to hang Will with his own hands, be assured he would do it. I must hasten to drag William from the lion's jaws, and I would not lose him for ever."

"Belike you are right, dear Robin, and my prudent counsel would be dangerous to follow in that case. I shall present myself at the Castle this very day, and, once inside, I may possibly be able to help you. I will question the Baron; and he will not answer, I shall address myself to the soldiers, who will, I hope, be open to the temptation of a heavy bribe. Rely on me; but an if my efforts be fruitless, I will let you know, and you must act with the greatest promptitude."

"That is understood. Here is my man coming back; he is accompanied by Halbert, Maude's foster brother. We shall now learn something of poor Will's fate."

"Well?" asked Robin, after having greeted his friend.

"I have very little to tell you," replied Halbert; "I only know that a prisoner hath been carried to Nottingham Castle,

and Much tells me that the unfortunate wretch is our poor friend Will Scarlett. If you wish to try and save him, Robin, you must lose no time; a monk, a pilgrim on his way through Nottingham, hath been sent for to the Castle to shrive the prisoner."

"Holy Mother of God, have pity on us!" cried Robin, in a trembling voice. "Will, my poor Will, is in danger of his life; we must rescue him; it must be done at any cost. You know naught else, Halbert?" he added.

"Naught relating to Will; but I have learnt that the Lady Christabel is going to be married at the end of the week."

"Lady Christabel to be married?" repeated Allan.

"Yea, master," replied Halbert, looking at the Knight with an air of surprise. "She is to marry the richest Norman in all England."

"Impossible! Quite impossible!" exclaimed Allan Clare.

"It is perfectly true," returned Halbert, "and great preparations are on foot at the Castle to celebrate the happy event."

"The happy event!" repeated the Knight, bitterly. "What is the name of the scoundrel who thinks to marry the Lady Christabel?"

"Are you a stranger to these parts, Master?" continued Halbert, "since you are unaware of the immense delight of the Baron Fitz-Alwine? His Lordship hath manœuvred so well that he hath succeeded in securing a colossal fortune in the person of Sir Tristan Goldsborough."

"Lady Christabel to be the wife of that hideous old man?" cried the Knight, completely taken aback. "Why, the creature is half dead! He is a monster of ugliness and sordid avarice. The daughter of Baron Fitz-Alwine is my betrothed, and so long as there is breath in my body, none other save I shall have a right to her."

"Your betrothed, master! Who, then, are you?"

"Sir Allan Clare," said Robin.

"The brother of the Lady Marian! The Lady Christabel's dearest friend?"

"Yea, Halbert," said Allan.

"Hurrah!" cried Halbert, throwing up his cap. "Here's a piece of good luck! Welcome to England! Your presence will change the tears of your beautiful betrothed into smiles. This odious

marriage is to be solemnised at the end of this week, and I' faith you have no time to lose, and you wish to prevent it."

"I will go and see the Baron this instant," said Allan. "And he thinks he can still play with me, he is wrong."

"You may count on my help, Sir Knight," said Robin; "and I will engage to put an all-powerful obstacle in the way of the accomplishment of this misfortune, to wit force allied with cunning. We shall carry off the Lady Christabel. My idea is that we should all four go to the Castle together; you will enter alone, while I await your return with Much and Halbert."

The young men soon reached the approach to the Castle. As the Knight went towards the drawbridge, a noise of chains was heard, the bridge was lowered, and an old man in the garb of a pilgrim emerged from the postern.

"Yonder comes the Confessor summoned by the Baron for poor William," said Halbert. "Question him, Robin; perhaps he can tell you what fate is destined for our friend."

"I had the same idea, good Halbert, and I feel that our meeting with this holy man is an omen of Divine favour. May the Holy Virgin protect you, good Father!" said Robin, respectfully saluting the old man.

"Amen to thy kind prayer, my son," replied the pilgrim.

"Have you come far, Father?"

"From the Holy Land, where I have made a long and wearisome pilgrimage to expiate the sins of my youth. Now, worn out with fatigue, I have returned to die beneath the sky of my native land."

"God hath vouchsafed you a long life, Father."

"Yea, my son, I shall soon be ninety years old, and my life seems but a dream."

"I pray the Virgin may give you calm repose in your last hours."

"So be it, my child. I, in my turn, pray Heaven to shower blessings on thy young head. Thou art good and a believer, be thou also charitable, and give a thought to those who suffer, to those about to die."

"Explain yourself, Father; I do not understand," said Robin, in a broken voice.

"Alas! alas!" returned the old man, "a soul is about to ascend to heaven, its last home. The body which it animates



can scarce count thirty years. A man of your age is about to die a terrible death. Pray for him, my son."

"Hath this man made his last confession to you, Father?"

"Yea. In a few hours more he will be violently removed from this world."

"Where is the unfortunate man?"

"In one of the dark dungeons of this stately pile."

"Is he alone?"

"Yea, my son, alone."

"And this unhappy creature is to die?" questioned the young man.

"To-morrow morning at sunrise."

"You are quite sure, Father, that the execution will not take place before daybreak?"

"I am quite certain. Alas! is it not soon enough? Thy words grieve me, my son; dost desire a brother's death?"

"No, holy man, no; a thousand times no! I would give my life to save him. I know the poor lad, Father; I know and love him. Know you to what death he is condemned? Have you heard whether he is to die within the Castle?"

"I learnt from the gaoler of the prison that the unhappy youth is to be put to death by the hangman of Nottingham. Orders have been given for a public execution in the market-place of that town."

"God keep us!" murmured Robin. "Kind, good Father," he went on, taking the old man's hand, "will you render me a service?"

"What wouldst thou, my son?"

"I desire, I pray, Father, that you will of your kindness return to the Castle and beg the Baron to grant you the favour of accompanying the prisoner to the foot of the gallows."

"I have already obtained that permission, my son; I shall be near thy friend to-morrow morning."

"Bless you, holy Father, bless you! I have one last word to say to the condemned man, and I would charge you to give it him. To-morrow morning I will be here, near this clump of trees; will you be so good as to confess me before entering the Castle?"

"I will meet thee punctually, my son."

"Thank you, holy Father; until to-morrow, then."

"To-morrow. And may the peace of our Lord go with thee."

Robin bowed reverently, and the Palmer, with his hands crossed on his breast, went on his way praying.

"Yea, to-morrow," repeated the young man. "We shall see to-morrow an if Will is to be hanged."

"It will be needful," said Halbert, who had listened to Robin's conversation with the prisoner's Confessor, "to place your men within a short distance from the place of execution."

"They will be within sound of call," said Robin.

"How will you screen them from view of the soldiers?"

"Do not be uneasy, my good Halbert," replied Robin. "My merry men have long possessed the art of making themselves invisible, even on the high-road; and, believe me, their doublets will not graze the Baron's soldiers, nor will they make their appearance, save at a pre-arranged signal from me."

"You seem so certain of success, my dear Robin," said Allan, "that I begin to wish I could be as hopeful about mine own affairs."

"Sir Knight," returned the young man, "first let me set William free, and put him safe in the hands of his dear little wife at Barnsdale, then we will think about the Lady Christabel. The projected marriage will not take place for several days; we have time to prepare for a serious struggle with Lord Fitz-Alwine."

"I will go into the Castle," said Allan, "and by hook or by crook I will get to the bottom of this business. If the Baron hath thought fit to break an engagement which he should, in honour, have held sacred, I shall consider myself justified in waiving all respect, and, willy-nilly, Lady Christabel shall be my wife."

"You are right, my friend. Present yourself at once to the Baron; he doth not expect you, and very like in his surprise he will deliver himself into your hands bound hand and foot. Speak him boldly, and make him understand you intend to use force, if need be, to win the Lady Christabel. Whilst you are taking these important measures with Lord Fitz-Alwine, I will go and seek out my men and prepare for the successful accomplishment of the expedition I have planned. If you should need me, send without delay to the place where we met a few minutes since; there you are sure of

finding one of my brave companions at any hour of the day or night. If it is necessary for you to have a talk with your faithful ally, you will be conducted to my retreat. But are you not afraid lest, once inside the Castle, it may be impossible for you to leave it again?"

"Lord Fitz-Alwine would not dare to treat a man like me with violence," replied Allan; "he would be exposing himself to too great a risk. Beside, an if he really intend to give Christabel to this hateful Tristan, he will be so eager to get rid of me that I fear he may refuse to receive me at all, rather than that he will wish to keep me near him. Farewell, then, for the present, my good Robin; I shall surely see you again before the end of the day."

"I shall expect you."

Whilst Allan Clare made his way towards the postern of the Castle, Robin, Halbert, and Much hastened to the town.

Introduced without the least difficulty into the apartment of Lord Fitz-Alwine, the Knight soon found himself in the presence of the terrible Castellan.

If a spirit had risen from the tomb, it could scarce have caused the Baron more dismay and terror than he experienced at sight of the handsome young man who stood before him with proud and dignified mien.

The Baron threw at his serving-man so withering a glance that the latter escaped from the room with the utmost speed his limbs were capable of.

"I did not expect to see you," said his Lordship, bringing back his wrathful eyes to the Knight.

"That may well be, my Lord; but here I am."

"So I see. Happily for me, you have broken your word—the term which I had allotted you expired yesterday."

"Your Lordship is in error; I am punctual to the rendezvous you gave me."

"I can hardly take your word for it."

"I am sorry, because you will oblige me to force you to do so. We undertook a formal engagement, and I am in the right in exacting its fulfilment."

"Have you fulfilled all the conditions of the agreement?"

"Of a truth have I. They were three: I was to obtain re-possession of my estates; I must possess one hundred thousand pieces of gold; and I must

return in seven years to claim the hand of the Lady Christabel."

"Do you really possess one hundred thousand pieces of gold?" asked the Baron, enviously.

"Yea, my Lord. King Henry hath restored me mine estates, and I have received the revenue arising from my patrimony since the day of its confiscation. I am rich, and I insist on your giving me the Lady Christabel to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried the Baron; "to-morrow! and if you were not here to-morrow," he added, sombrely, "the contract would be annulled?"

"Yea; but hearken to me, Lord Fitz-Alwine. I advise you to renounce all thoughts of consummating the diabolical schemes you are meditating at this moment. I am within my rights; I am here at the hour appointed me, and naught in all the world (it is useless to dream of resorting to force)—naught in all the world will constrain me to renounce her I love. If in desperation you resort to fraud and cunning, I will take—of that you may sure—a terrible revenge. I know of a dark secret in your life, which I will reveal. I have sojourned at the court of the King of France; I have been initiated into the secret of an affair which doth very narrowly concern you."

"What affair?" questioned the Baron, uneasily.

"It is useless for me to enter into long explanations with you just now; let it suffice that I have learnt and keep a note of the names of the miserable Englishmen who have offered to place their country under the yoke of the stranger."

Lord Fitz-Alwine became livid.

"Keep the promise you have made me, my Lord, and I will forget you have been a coward and a traitor to your King."

"Sir Knight, you insult an old man," said the Baron, assuming an indignant air.

"I speak truth, and no more. One more refusal, my Lord, one more lie, one more subterfuge, and the proofs of your patriotism will be sent to the King of England."

"It is lucky for you, Allan Clare," said the Baron, blandly, "that Heaven hath bestowed upon me a calm and equable temper; if I were of an irritable and



hasty nature, you would pay dearly for your audacity, for I would have you thrown into one of the Castle moats."

"That would be a great mistake, my Lord, for it would in no wise save you from the Royal vengeance."

"Your youth excuses the impetuosity of your words, Sir Knight; I would rather show indulgence where it would be easy for me to punish. Why speak threateningly, ere you know whether I really intend to refuse you the hand of my daughter?"

"Because I have learnt for certain that you have promised the Lady Christabel to a miserable and sordid old man—to Sir Tristan Goldsborough."

"Indeed, indeed! And from what silly gossip learnt you this foolish story?"

"That matters not; the whole town of Nottingham hath heard rumours of the preparations for this rich and ridiculous marriage."

"I cannot be responsible, Sir Knight, for the stupid lies which circulate around me."

"Then you have not promised the hand of your daughter to Sir Tristan?"

"I must beg to decline to answer such a question. Until to-morrow I am at liberty to think and wish what I please; to-morrow is yours. Come then, and I will give you a full satisfaction of your desires. Farewell, Sir Allan Clare," added the old man, rising; "I wish you a very good day, and pray you to leave me."

"I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, Baron Fitz-Alwine. Remember that a gentleman hath only one promise."

"Very well, very well," grumbled the old man, turning his back on his visitor.

Allan left the Baron's apartment with a heavy heart. He could not hide from himself that the old Lord meditated some perfidy. His menacing looks had accompanied the young man to the threshold of the room; then he had retired to the embrasure of the window, disdaining to respond to the Knight's parting salute.

As soon as Allan had disappeared (the young man went to seek Robin Hood) the Baron rang a small handbell on the table violently.

"Send Black Peter to me," said the Baron, gruffly.

"Anon! my Lord."

Some minutes later the soldier in question appeared before Lord Fitz-Alwine.

"Peter," said the Baron, "thou hast under thee brave and trustworthy fellows that will execute, without comment, any orders given them?"

"Yea, my Lord."

"They are courageous, and know how to forget the services they are able to render?"

"Yea, my Lord."

"That is well. A knight, elegantly clad in a red tunic, hath just left here; follow him with two good men, and see that he is no longer able to trouble any one. Dost understand?"

"Perfectly, my Lord," replied Black Peter, with a frightful leer, and half drawing a huge dagger from its sheath.

"Thou shalt be well rewarded, brave Peter. Go without fear, but act secretly and with prudence. An if this butterfly take the road through the wood, let him get well under the trees, and there you will have it all your own way. After he hath been despatched to another world, bury him at the foot of some old oak, and cover the spot with leaves and brushwood, so that his body is not likely to be discovered."

"Your orders shall be faithfully executed, my Lord; and when you see me again, the Knight will sleep beneath a carpet of green grass."

"I shall look out for thee. Now up and follow yonder impertinent fop without delay."

Accompanied by two men, Black Peter left the Castle, and soon found himself on the track of the young Knight.

The latter, with pensive brow, his mind absorbed and his heart heavy with sorrow, paced slowly along the borders of Sherwood Forest. On seeing the young man enter under the covert of the trees, the assassins following him trembled with sinister joy. They hastened their steps, and took hiding behind a bush, ready to throw themselves upon the young man at an opportune moment.

Allan Clare looked about for the guide promised by Robin Hood, and whilst he searched he reflected on the means necessary for tearing Christabel from the hands of her unworthy father.

A sound of hurried footsteps roused the Knight from his sad reverie. Turning his head, he beheld three men with evil faces advancing towards him, sword in hand.

Allan set his back against a tree, drew

his sword from the scabbard, and said in a firm voice—

“Ho, caitiffs! what would you have?”

“We would have thy life, thou gaudy butterfly!” cried Black Peter, throwing himself upon the young man.

“Back, rogue!” said Allan, striking his aggressor in the face. “Back all!” he continued, disarming with incomparable skill the second of his adversaries.

Black Peter redoubled his efforts, but he could not succeed in touching his adversary, who had not only rendered one of the assassins powerless by sending his sword up into the branches of a tree, but had likewise broken the skull of the third.

Disarmed and mad with rage, Black Peter uprooted a young tree and again rushed upon Allan. He hit the Knight on the head with such violence that the latter let fall his weapon and fell senseless to the ground.

“The quarry is pulled down!” Peter cried exultingly, as he assisted his wounded companions to their feet. “Get ye along to the Castle, and leave me alone; I will finish this fellow. Your presence here is a danger, and your groanings weary me. Begone; I will myself dig the hole in which to bury the young Lord. Give me the spade you brought.”

“’Tis here,” said one of the men. “Peter,” added the wretched varlet, “I am half dead, I cannot walk.”

“Begone, or I will finish thee,” replied Peter, brutally.

The two men, overcome with pain and fright, dragged themselves painfully out of the Forest.

Left alone, Peter set to work; he had half finished his dreadful task when he received upon the shoulder a blow from a stick, so vigorously delivered that he fell full length at the edge of the hole.

When the violence of the pain was a little spent, the wretch turned his eyes towards the dealer of this very just retribution. He then perceived the rubicund visage of a robust fellow arrayed in the garb of a Dominican Friar.

“How now, profane rascal with the black muzzle!” cried the Friar, in stentorian tones, “dost knock a gentleman on the head, and then, to hide thine infamy, bury thy victim? Answer me, robber, who art thou?”

“My sword shall speak for me,” said Peter, leaping to his feet. “It shall send

thee to another world, where thou mayest have leisure to ask Satan the name thou dost desire to know.”

“I shall not need to give myself that trouble; an I have the bad luck to die before thee, insolent rogue, I can read on thy face thine infernal parentage. Now let me counsel thy sword to keep quiet, for an it attempt to wag its tongue, my cudgel will impose an eternal silence on it. Get thee hence, that is the best thing thou canst do.”

“Not until I have shown thee that I know how to use a sword,” said Peter, striking at the Monk.

The blow was so rapid, so violent, and so adroitly aimed that it struck the Brother on the left hand, cutting three fingers almost to the bone. The monk uttered a cry, fell upon Peter on the instant, and crushing him in his powerful embrace, applied a volley of blows from his cudgel.

Then a strange sensation overcame the miserable assassin; he lost his sword, his eyes grew dim, his senses failed him, and he lost all power of defending himself. When the Brother ceased beating him, Peter fell dead.

“The knave!” muttered the Monk, spent with pain and weariness, “the damned knave! Did he imagine that the fingers of poor Tuck were made to be cut about by a Norman dog? I think I have given him a good lesson; unfortunately, he will not derive much benefit from it, since he hath breathed his last breath. So much the worse; ’twas all his fault, not mine. Why did he kill this poor boy? Ah!” cried the good Brother, placing his sound hand on the Knight’s breast, “he still breathes, his body is warm and his heart beats, feebly ’tis true, but enow to show that there is still life in him. I will bear him on my shoulders to the retreat. Poor lad, he is no great weight! As for thee, vile assassin,” added Tuck, pushing away Peter’s body with his foot, “lie there, and if the wolves have not yet dined, thou wilt serve them for a meal.”

Saying which, the Monk took his way with a firm and rapid step in the direction of the retreat of the merry men.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few words will suffice to explain Will Scarlett’s capture.

The man who had seen him in company with Robin Hood and Little John in the



Inn at Mansfield was under orders seeking the fugitive. Perceiving the young man accompanied by five strong fellows who might lend him a helping hand, the wary scout determined to await a more favourable moment to effect the capture. Quitting the Inn, he sent to Nottingham to ask for a company of soldiers, and these, guided by the spy, repaired to Barnsdale at midnight.

Next morning a strange fatality led Will outside the Castle; the poor youth fell into the hands of the soldiers, and was carried off without being able to offer the smallest resistance.

At first he was seized with utter despair; but the meeting with Much gave him some hope. He understood instantly that, once made aware of his unhappy plight, Robin Hood would do everything in the world to come to his aid, and if he could not succeed in saving him, at least he would allow no obstacle to deter him from avenging his death. He knew, moreover—and this afforded some relief to his heavy heart—that many tears would be shed over his cruel fate; he knew, too, that Maude, so happy in his return, would weep bitterly at the destruction of their mutual happiness.

Imprisoned in his dark dungeon, Will awaited in agonies of fear the time fixed for his execution, and every hour brought him both hope and anguish. The poor prisoner listened with straining ears for every sound from without, hoping always to hear the echo of Robin Hood's horn.

The first streak of dawn found Will at his prayers; he had confessed piously to the good pilgrim, and with strengthened spirit, and confident in him whose succour he still expected, he made ready to follow the guards who came to seek him at sunrise.

The soldiers set Will in their midst, and took the road to Nottingham.

On entering the town, the escort was soon surrounded by a large concourse of the inhabitants, who, since dawn, had been on the look-out for the melancholy procession.

However great the young man's hopes might be, he felt his spirits fail at seeing around him not one single face he knew. His heart sank, and the tears, though manfully repressed, wetted his eyelashes; nevertheless, he still hoped, for a voice within him seemed to say, "Robin Hood is not far away, Robin Hood will come."

When they reached the hideous gallows erected by the Baron's orders, William became livid; he had not expected to die so infamous a death.

"I wish to speak to Lord Fitz-Alwine," said he.

In his capacity of Sheriff the latter was obliged to assist at the execution.

"What dost want of me, wretch?" asked the Baron.

"My Lord, may I not hope for pardon?"

"No," replied the old man, coldly.

"Then," said William, in a firm voice, "I implore a favour which it is impossible for a generous soul to refuse me."

"What favour?"

"My Lord, I belong to a noble Saxon family, whose name is the synonym of honour, and never yet hath one of its members merited the scorn of his fellow-citizens. I am a soldier and a gentleman; I deserve the death of a soldier."

"Thou wilt be hanged," said the Baron, brutally.

"My Lord, I have risked my life on the field of battle, I do not deserve to be hanged like a thief."

"Ah, indeed!" sneered the old man.

"And in what fashion, then, dost wish to expiate your crime?"

"Give me but a sword, and command your soldiers to pierce me with their spears or pikes; I would die as dies an honest man, with free arms and face upturned to Heaven."

"Dost think I am fool enough to risk the life of one of my men to satisfy thy fancy? Not at all, not at all! Thou wilt be hanged."

"My Lord, I conjure you, I beseech you to have pity on me. I will not even ask for a sword, I will not defend myself, I will let your men hack me in pieces."

"Vile wretch!" said the Baron; "thou hast killed a Norman, and thou dost ask pity from a Norman. Art mad? Back, I say! Thou shalt die upon the gallows; and shalt soon have company, too, I trust—the robber who with his band of rascals doth infest Sherwood Forest."

"An if he you speak of with such scorn were within earshot, I would laugh at your boasts, cowardly poltroon that you are! Remember this, Baron Fitz-Alwine, if I die, Robin Hood will avenge me! Beware of Robin Hood! Ere this week be gone, he will be at the Castle of Nottingham."

"Let him come, and eke his whole

band with him! I will have two hundred gallows erected. Hangman, do your duty," added the Baron.

The hangman put his hand on William's shoulder. The poor youth threw a glance of despair around him, and seeing only a silent and pitying crowd, commended his soul to God.

"Stay," said the trembling voice of the pilgrim—"stay; I have one last benediction to give to my unhappy penitent."

"Your duties toward the wretched creature are ended," cried the Baron, in a furious tone. "It is useless to retard his execution longer."

"Ungodly man," cried the pilgrim, "would you deprive this young man of the succour of religion?"

"Hurry, then," said Lord Fitz-Alwine, impatiently; "I am weary of all these delays."

"Soldiers, stand back a little," said the old pilgrim; "the prayers of a dying man must not fall upon profane ears."

At a sign from the Baron the soldiers fell back a little way from the prisoner, and William was left alone with the pilgrim at the foot of the gallows.

The hangman was listening respectfully to some orders from the Baron.

"Do not move, Will," said the pilgrim, leaning towards the young man; "I am Robin Hood, and I am going to cut the cords which fetter your movements. Then we will dash into the midst of the soldiers, and sheer surprise will rob them of their wits."

"Bless you, dear Robin, bless you!" murmured poor William, choking with joy.

"Stoop down, William, and pretend to talk to me. Good! the cords are cut. Now take the sword which hangs beneath my gown. Can you feel it?"

"Yea! here it is," murmured Will.

"Very well; now, put your back against mine, and we will show Lord Fitz-Alwine that you did not come into this world to be hanged."

With a movement quicker than thought, Robin Hood dropped his pilgrim's gown, and revealed to the amazed gaze of the assembled crowd the well-known costume of the renowned outlaw.

"My Lord," cried Robin, in a firm and thrilling voice, "William Gamwell is one of our band of merry men. You took him from me. I am come to reclaim him, and in exchange I will send you

the corpse of the rogue who had your orders foully to destroy the good Knight Allan Clare."

"Five hundred pieces of gold to the man who arrests this robber," bellowed the Baron; "five hundred pieces of gold to the valiant soldier who will secure him."

Robin Hood flashed a glance at the crowd, who stood stupefied with fear.

"I do not advise any one to risk his life," said he; "my comrades will rally round me."

As he finished speaking, Robin blew his horn, and instantly a large body of foresters issued from the Forest, their bows ready strung in their hands.

"To arms!" cried the Baron, "to arms, faithful Normans; exterminate these bandits!"

A volley of arrows poured upon the Baron's company. The latter, seized with terror, threw himself on his horse, and urged it with loud cries in the direction of the Castle. The citizens of Nottingham, distracted with fright, followed in the steps of their lord; and the soldiers, carried away by the terror of the general panic, took to their heels in headlong flight.

"Ho for the good green wood! Ho for brave Robin Hood!" shouted the merry men, as they chased their foes before them with great shouts of laughter.

Citizens, foresters, and soldiers dashed through the town, helter-skelter, the first dumb with fright, the second laughing, the last with rage in their hearts. The Baron was the first to gain the interior of the Castle, whither the others followed him, all except the merry men, who on arriving there took leave of their faint-hearted adversaries with shouts of derision.

When Robin Hood, accompanied by his band, had again taken the Forest road, the citizens who had suffered no hurt or loss through this strange encounter, sang the praises of the young Chief and his readiness to succour any in distress.

The maidens blended their sweet voices in this chorus of eulogy, one of them even declaring she thought the Foresters appeared such kind and merry gentlemen, she would never more fear to cross the Forest alone.



## CHAPTER III

HAVING assured himself that Robin Hood had no intention of besieging the Castle, Lord Fitz-Alwine, with aching body and mind torn by a thousand projects, each more impossible than the other, retired to his own apartments in the Castle.

There the Baron reflected on the strange audacity of Robin Hood, who in broad daylight, with no other weapon save an inoffensive sword (for he had only drawn it from the scabbard to cut the prisoner's bonds) had enough strength of mind to hold a large body of men in check. Remembering the shameful flight of his soldiers, and forgetting that he had been the first to set them the example, the Baron cursed their cowardice.

"What craven terror!" he cried; "what silly panic! What will the citizens of Nottingham think of us? *Their* flight was permissible, for they had no means of defence, but well-disciplined soldiers, armed to the teeth! My reputation for valour and courage will be gone for ever by this unheard-of behaviour!"

From this reflection, so humiliating to his self-esteem, the Baron passed to another train of thought. So greatly did he exaggerate the shame of his defeat, that he ended by making his soldiers entirely responsible for it; he imagined that instead of having shown the way for their stampede, he had covered their mad flight, and that with no protection save his own courage, he had cut a way through the ranks of the outlaws. Utterly confounding fact and fancy, this last thought brought the Baron's indignation to a head; he dashed from his room and burst headlong into the Courtyard, where his men, gathered in little groups, were talking over their pitiful defeat, for which they blamed their noble lord. The Baron fell like a thunderbolt into the midst of the troop, and ordered them to form up around him, whilst he read them a lecture on their infamous cowardice. After this, he cited imaginary examples of senseless panics, adding that never in the memory of man had such cowardice been known as that which they had just exhibited. The Baron spoke with such vehemence and indignation, and adopted such an air of invincible and unappreciated courage,

that the soldiers, influenced by the feeling of respect in which they held their Chief, at last came actually to believe that they alone were really guilty. The Baron's rage appeared to them a righteous indignation; they bowed their heads, and fully believed that they were no better than poltroons frightened by their own shadows. When the Baron had terminated his pompous discourse, one of the men proposed to pursue the outlaws to their Forest retreat. This proposition was hailed with acclamation by the entire troop, and the soldier with whom had originated this bellicose notion, begged the valiant orator to put himself at their head. But the latter, little disposed to accede to this ill-timed demand, replied that though he was gratified at such a token of high esteem, it seemed to him for the moment far wiser to remain at home.

"My brave fellows," added the Baron, "prudence counsels us to await a more favourable opportunity of seizing Robin Hood; it will be wiser, I think, to abstain from any precipitate measures, at any rate, for the present. Patience now, and courage in the hour of battle, is all I ask of you."

Having thus said, the Baron, who feared that his men might insist more strongly, hastily left them to their dreams of victory. His mind at ease concerning his military reputation, the Baron forgot Robin Hood and turned his attention to his personal affairs, and the aspirants to his daughter's hand. It is unnecessary to add that Lord Fitz-Alwine relied entirely on the proved skill of Black Peter for the realisation of his dearest hopes, and imagined that Allan Clare no longer existed. It is true that Robin Hood had informed him of the death of his blood-thirsty emissary, but it was of little consequence to the Baron that Peter had paid with his life the services rendered to his lord and master. Allan Clare disposed of, no obstacle could come between Christabel and Sir Tristan, and the latter was so near his grave that the young wife might exchange in a day her bridal veil for a widow's weeds. Young and passing fair, free of all bonds, enormously rich, Lady Christabel might then make a marriage worthy of her beauty and her immense fortune. "But what marriage?" asked the Baron of himself; and, fired by an overpowering

ambition, he sought for a husband who should fulfil his highest hopes. The elated old man had glimpses of the splendour of the Court, and he dreamt of the son of Henry II. At that moment of incessant strife between the two parties which divided the kingdom of England, necessity had made a great power of wealth, and the elevation of the Lady Christabel to the rank of Princess Royal was not quite impossible of realisation. The exciting hope which Lord Fitz-Alwine had conceived began to take the shape of a project on the eve of execution; already he looked upon himself as the father-in-law of the King of England, and he wondered to what nation it would be most advantageous to unite his grandsons and great-grandsons, when Robin's words recurred to his mind, and shattered this castle in the air. Perhaps Allan Clare was still alive! "I must make certain of it at once," cried the Baron, almost beside himself at the mere supposition. He rang the hand-bell, placed within his reach night and day, violently, and a servant appeared.

"Is Black Peter in the Castle?"

"No, my Lord, he went out yesterday with two men, who returned alone, one grievously wounded, the other half-dead."

"Send the one who is able to get about to me."

"Yea, my Lord."

The man required soon made his appearance, his head enveloped in bandages and his left arm in a sling.

"Where is Black Peter?" inquired the Baron, without even bestowing a look of pity on the poor creature.

"I know not, my Lord; I left Peter in the Forest digging a hole in which to hide the body of the young Lord whom we had killed."

The Baron's face became purple; he tried to speak, confused words rushed to his lips; he turned his head away, and signed to the assassin to leave the room. The latter, who wished for nothing better, went out, supporting himself by the wall.

"Dead!" murmured the Baron, with an indefinable feeling. "Dead!" he repeated; and, pale as death, he continued to stammer in a feeble voice, "Dead! Dead!"

Let us leave Lord Fitz-Alwine a prey to his evil conscience, and seek his daughter's destined husband.

Sir Tristan had not left the Castle;

and indeed his sojourn there was to be prolonged until the end of the week.

The Baron wished his daughter's marriage to be celebrated in the Castle Chapel; but Sir Tristan, who feared some sinister attack on his person, preferred to be married openly at Linton Abbey, about a mile from the town of Nottingham.

"My good friend," said Lord Fitz-Alwine, in a peremptory tone, when this question was broached, "you are a stubborn fool, for you do not understand either my good faith or your own interests. You must not imagine that my daughter will be overjoyed to be yours, nor that she will walk gladly to the altar. I cannot tell you the reason, but I have a presentiment that at Linton Abbey some great disaster may occur. We are in the neighbourhood of a troop of bandits who, led by an audacious chief, are quite capable of surrounding and plundering us."

"I should be escorted by my servants," replied Sir Tristan; "they are numerous and of tried courage."

"As you please," said the Baron. "If any accident occur, you will only have yourself to blame."

"Never be uneasy; I will take the responsibility of the fault upon myself, if it be a fault, my choice of the place for celebrating the wedding."

"By the way," said the Baron, "do not forget, I beg, that on the eve of the happy day you are to give me a million pieces of gold."

"The chest containing that amount is in my room, Fitz-Alwine," said Sir Tristan, fetching a deep sigh, "and it will be carried into your apartment on the day of the wedding."

"On the eve," said the Baron—"the eve, so it was agreed."

"On the eve, then."

With this the old men parted, the one going to pay his court to the Lady Christabel, the other returning to his dreams of greatness.

At Barnsdale Hall the gloom was profound. Old Sir Guy, his wife and their daughters, passed the hours of the day in mutual consolation and the nights in weeping over the death of poor Will.

The day after the lad's miraculous deliverance, the Gamwell family was assembled in the great hall, talking sadly over Will's strange disappearance, when



the joyous sound of a hunting-horn was heard at the gate of the Hall.

"It is Robin!" cried Marian, rushing to the window.

"He must be bringing good news," said Barbara. "Come, dear Maude, hope and courage, William is coming back."

"Alas, my sister! may you prove right," said Maude, weeping.

"I am right! I am right!" cried Barbara. "Here are Will and Robin with a young man, doubtless a friend of theirs."

Maude flew to the door, and Marian, who had recognised her brother (for Allan Clare had only been stunned, and, after lying unconscious for a few hours, was now quite recovered), threw herself, like Maude, into the young men's outstretched arms. Maude, nearly delirious with joy, could only murmur fondly, "Will! Will! dear Will!" whilst Marian, with her arms around her brother's neck, was unable to utter a word. We will not attempt to depict the joy of this now happy family, to whom God had sent back safe and sound him they had mourned as lost for ever.

Laughter soon drove away their tears, and both beloved children were strained to the maternal bosom with the same fond kisses and caresses. Sir Guy gave his blessing to Will and to his son's deliverer, while Lady Gamwell, radiant with joy, pressed the charming Maude to her heart.

"Was I not right in maintaining that Robin was bringing good tidings?" said Barbara, kissing Will as she spoke.

"Of a truth, you were right, dear Barbara," replied Marian, pressing her brother's hand.

"I should like," said saucy Barbara, "to pretend that Robin was Will, and hug him with all my might."

"Such a mode of expressing your gratitude would set us a very bad example, Barbara dear," laughed Marian; "for we should all feel constrained to imitate you, and poor Robin would succumb beneath the weight of so much happiness."

"My death would be an easy one, at any rate. Think you not so, Lady Marian?"

Marian blushed, and an almost imperceptible smile hovered on Allan Clare's lips.

"Sir Knight," said Will, approaching

the young man, "you see what an affection Robin hath inspired in my sisters' hearts; but he well deserves it. In recounting our troubles to you, Robin never told how he had rescued my father from death; he said nothing of his devotion to Winifred and Barbara; he spoke not of his affectionate care—that of the best of friends—for Maude, my affianced bride. When giving you tidings of Lady Marian, Robin added not, 'I have watched over her happiness when you were far away; in me she had a faithful friend, a devoted brother.' He did not . . ."

"William, I beseech you," interrupted Robin, "spare my blushes; for though Lady Marian avers that I cannot blush, my face doth verily feel afire."

"My dear Robin," said Allan, visibly affected, as he wrung the young man by the hand, "I have long been greatly in your debt, and at length I am happy in being able to repay you. It did not need Will's words to assure me that you had nobly fulfilled the delicate mission confided to you; the loyalty of all your deeds was a sure guarantee of that."

"Oh, brother," said Marian, "if you only knew how good and generous he hath been to us all! If you only knew how praiseworthy his conduct toward me hath been, you would honour him and you would love him as . . . as . . ."

"As thou dost thyself—is it not so?" said Allan, with a tender smile.

"Yea, as I do myself," replied Marian, her face radiant with a smile of unutterable pride, and her sweet voice tremulous with emotion. "I fear not to openly avow my love for the generous man who hath shared the sorrows of my heart. Robin loves me, dear Allan; his love for me is as deep and hath endured as long as mine for him. My hand is promised to Robin Hood, and we only awaited thy presence to ask of God His holy benediction."

"I am ashamed of my selfishness, Marian," said Allan; "and my shame forces me to admire the more Robin's gallant behaviour. Thy natural protector was far from thee, and thou didst not deem it fitting to be happy until he returned. Forgive me both for abandoning you so cruelly; Christabel will plead my cause to your tender hearts. Thank you, dear Robin," added the Knight, "than you; no words can express to you my sincere gratitude. You love Marian and



THE WRINKLED FACE OF SIR TRISTAN APPEARED





Marian loves you ; I am proud and happy to give you her hand."

As he finished speaking, the Knight took his sister's hand, and with a smile placed it in that of the young man, who, straining Marian to his bursting heart, kissed her passionately. William seemed quite intoxicated with the joy he saw around him, and with the object of suppressing the violence of his emotion, he took Maude round the waist and kissed her neck again and again, uttering some incoherent words and finishing with a triumphant "Hurrah!"

"We will be married on the same day, won't we, Robin?" cried Will, joyously, "or rather we will be married to-morrow. Oh no! not to-morrow; it is unlucky to put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day—we will be married to-day. What say you, Maude?"

The girl laughed.

"You are in a tremendous hurry," cried the Knight.

"A hurry! It is easy for you, Allan, to criticise; but an if, like me, you had been torn from the arms of your beloved when you were on the point of giving her your name, you would not say I was in too great a hurry. Am I not right, Maude?"

"Yea, William, you are right; but our marriage cannot take place to-day."

"Why not? I should like to know, why not?" repeated the lad, impatiently.

"Because it is necessary for me to leave Barnsdale in a few hours, friend Will," replied the Knight, "and I must certainly be present at your wedding and at my sister's. I for my part hope to have the happiness of marrying the Lady Christabel, and our three weddings could then be celebrated on the same day. Wait a little longer, William; in one week from to-day all will be settled to our mutual satisfaction."

"Wait another week?" cried Will. "It is impossible!"

"But, William," said Robin, "a week is soon gone, and you have a thousand reasons for patience."

"Well, I resign myself," said the young man, dismally. "You are all against me, and I have never a soul to speak up for me. Maude, who of rights should add the eloquence of her sweet voice to mine, remains silent, so I will hold my tongue too. I suppose, Maude, we ought to talk of our future home. Come, let us go round

the garden; that ought to take a good two hours at least, and it will be so much subtracted from the eternity of a week."

Without awaiting the girl's consent, Will took her hand, and laughingly led her out under the shady trees of the park.

A week after the interview between Allan Clare and Lord Fitz-Alwine, the Lady Christabel was alone in her room, seated, or rather crouching, in an arm-chair. The silken folds of a beautiful white satin dress draped the girl's cowering form, and a veil of English point covered her blonde tresses. A deathly pallor overspread her delicate and perfect features, her colourless lips were closed, and her large eyes, with their listless look, were fixed in a terrified stare on a door opposite.

From time to time a large tear rolled down her cheeks, and this tear, a pearl of sorrow, was the only sign of life her enfeebled body gave.

Two hours passed in dreadful waiting. Christabel was hardly conscious; her mind, steeped in happy memories of a past beyond recall, regarded with unspeakable horror the approaching sacrifice.

"He hath forgot me," wailed the poor girl, suddenly, wringing her hands, whiter than the satin of her dress; "he hath forgot her whom he said he loved, whom alone he loved; he hath forgot his vows—he is married to another. Oh, God! have pity on me; my strength fails me, for my heart is broken. I have suffered so much already! For him have I borne bitter words, the loveless looks of the father I should love and respect! For him I bore ill-treatment without complaint, even the sombre solitude of the cloister! I believed in him and he hath deceived me!"

A convulsive sob escaped her, and the tears gushed from her eyes. A light tap at the door aroused her from her painful thoughts.

"Come in," she said in a stifled voice.

The door opened, and the wrinkled face of Sir Tristan appeared before the eyes of the unhappy girl.

"Sweet lady," said the old man, with a leer, which he fondly imagined was an enchanting smile, "the hour of our departure is about to strike. Prithee allow me to offer you my arm; the escort awaits us, and we shall soon be the happiest couple in England."



"My Lord," stammered Christabel, "I cannot go downstairs."

"How say you, dear love—you cannot go downstairs? I do not well understand; you are quite ready, and they wait for us. Come, give me your dear, dainty hand."

"Sir Tristan," replied Christabel, as she rose with burning eyes and trembling lips, "hear me, I beseech you, and if there be a spark of pity in you, you will save the poor girl, who thus implores you, from this terrible ceremony."

"Terrible ceremony!" repeated Sir Tristan, in astonishment. "What means this, my Lady? I do not comprehend you."

"Spare me the pain of an explanation," Christabel answered, with a sob, "and I will bless you, Sir, and ever remember you in my prayers."

"You appear agitated, my pretty dove," said the old man in honeyed accents. "Calm yourself, my love, and this evening, or to-morrow, if you prefer it, you shall make your little confidences to me. At present we have no time to lose, but when we are married it will be different; we shall have plenty of leisure, and I will listen to you from morn till eve."

"In the name of pity, Sir, hear me now. If my father hath deceived you, I will not buoy you up with false hopes. My Lord, I do not love you; my heart is given to a young Lord who was my childhood's earliest friend. At the very moment when I am about to bestow my hand upon you, I am thinking of him. I love him, my Lord, I love him, and my whole soul is his, and his alone."

"You will soon forget this young man, fair lady. Once my wife, believe me, you will think of him no more."

"Never shall I forget him; his image is indelibly graven on my heart."

"At your age we think we shall love for ever, my dear love; then time creeps on and effaces in his march the tenderly cherished image. But come, we will speak of all this another time, and I will help you to set the hope of the future betwixt the past and the present."

"You have no pity, Sir?"

"I love you, Christabel."

"God have pity on me!" sighed the poor girl.

"God will certainly have pity," said the old man, taking Christabel's hand. "He will send you resignation and oblivion."

Sir Tristan kissed the cold hand in his with a respect mingled with tenderness and sympathy.

"You will be happy, fair lady," he said. Christabel smiled sadly.

"I shall die," she thought to herself.

At Linton Abbey great preparations were being made for the wedding of the Lady Christabel and old Sir Tristan.

Ever since daybreak the Chapel had been hung with magnificent hangings, and sweet-smelling flowers diffused the most fragrant perfumes throughout the sanctuary. The Bishop of Hereford, who was to perform the marriage ceremony, stood at the Church door, with Monks in white vestments around him, awaiting the nuptial procession. Shortly before the arrival of Sir Tristan and the Lady Christabel, a man bearing in his hand a small harp presented himself before the Bishop.

"My Lord," said the new-comer, making a respectful genuflexion, "are you not about to celebrate a High Mass in honour of the bride and bridegroom?"

"Yea, friend, I am," returned the Bishop. "But why dost thou ask?"

"My Lord," answered the stranger, "I am the best harpist in France or England, and usually in much request at all feasts. Having heard of the intended marriage betwixt the rich Sir Tristan and Baron Fitz-Alwine's only daughter, I am come to offer his Lordship my services."

"An thy talent match thy vanity and assurance, thou art welcome."

"I thank you, my Lord."

"The sound of the harp pleaseth me much," the Bishop continued, "and I should love to hear thee play before the wedding party arriveth."

"My Lord," replied the stranger, haughtily, drawing the folds of his long cloak around him with a majestic air, "an I were a wandering minstrel, like those you are wont to hear, I would fall in with your wishes; but I play only at stated seasons and in suitable places. By-and-by I hope to give you complete satisfaction."

"Insolent varlet," replied the Bishop, in an angry voice, "I command thee to play to me this very instant."

"I will not touch a string until the escort arrive," said the stranger, imperturbably; "but when it doth come, you will hear sounds which will astonish you. Of that rest assured."

"We shall be able to judge of thy merits," replied the Bishop, "for here they come."

The stranger stepped back a few paces, while the Bishop advanced to meet the procession.

As she was about to enter the Church, Christabel turned half fainting to Baron Fitz-Alwine.

"Father," she said in a faltering voice, "have pity on me; this marriage will be my death."

A severe look from the Baron silenced the poor girl.

"Sir Knight," added Christabel, laying her trembling hand on Sir Tristan's arm, "be not merciless; you can still restore me to life. Have pity on me!"

"We will speak of that later," said Sir Tristan; and he signed to the Bishop to enter the Church.

The Baron took his daughter's hand, and was about to conduct her to the altar, when a loud voice cried "Stay!"

Lord Fitz-Alwine uttered a cry; Sir Tristan tottered, and had to lean for support against the great doorway of the Church. The stranger took the Lady Christabel's hand in his.

"Presumptuous caitiff!" said the Bishop, recognising the minstrel, "who gave thee permission to lay thy mercenary hands on this noble lady?"

"'Tis Providence sends me to succour her in her helplessness," replied the stranger, haughtily.

The Baron threw himself upon the minstrel.

"Who are you?" he asked; "and why come you here to disturb a holy ceremony?"

"Villain!" cried the stranger, "call you this shameful union of a young maiden with an old man a holy ceremony? My Lady," he added, bowing respectfully to the Lady Christabel, who was half dead with anguish, "you are come into the House of the Lord to receive the name of an honest man, and that name you shall receive. Take courage! Divine Providence yet watcheth over your innocence."

The minstrel loosed with one hand the girdle which confined his robe, while with the other he raised to his lips a hunting-born.

"Robin Hood!" cried the Baron.

"Robin Hood! the friend of Allan Clare!" murmured the Lady Christabel.

"Yea, Robin Hood and his Merrie Men," replied our hero, indicating by a glance a number of foresters, who had stolen up silently and surrounded the escort.

At the same moment an elegantly clad young knight threw himself at the feet of Lady Christabel.

"My Lord," said Robin Hood, respectfully approaching the Bishop with bared head, "you were about to unite, contrary to all human and social laws, two beings never destined by Heaven to dwell beneath one roof. Behold this young maiden; look at the husband whom the insatiable avarice of her father would have given her. Since earliest childhood the Lady Christabel hath been betrothed to the Knight Allan Clare. Like herself he is young, rich, and noble; he loves her, and we are come to humbly beg you to bless their union."

"I formally oppose the marriage!" cried the Baron, striving to break from the grasp of Little John, to whom had fallen the lot of guarding him.

"Peace, inhuman man!" cried Robin Hood. "Dost dare to raise thy voice on the threshold of this holy place, and give the lie to the promises thou hast made?"

"I have made no promises," roared Lord Fitz-Alwine.

"My Lord," continued Robin Hood, addressing the Bishop, "will you unite these young people?"

"I cannot do it without the consent of Lord Fitz-Alwine."

"Which consent I will never give."

"My Lord," continued Robin, taking no notice of the vociferations of the old man, "I await your final decision."

"I cannot take it upon me to do as you wish," replied the Bishop; "the banns have not been published, and the law doth require . . ."

"We will obey the law," said Robin. "Friend Little John, confide his Lordship to the care of one of our men, and do you publish the banns."

Little John obeyed. Three times he announced the marriage of Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel Fitz-Alwine, but the Bishop again refused to give the young people his blessing.

"Your decision is final, my Lord?" asked Robin.

"It is," replied the Bishop.

"So be it. I had foreseen such an



event, and am accompanied by a holy man, who hath the right to officiate. My father," continued Robin, addressing an old man, who had remained unnoticed, "I pray you enter the Chapel; the young couple will follow you."

The pilgrim, the same who had connived at Will's escape, advanced slowly.

"I am here, my son," he said; "I go to pray for the unfortunate and to beseech God to pardon the wicked."

Guarded by the merrie men, the party entered the Chapel quietly, and the ceremony began at once. The Bishop disappeared, Sir Tristan groaned dismally, and Lord Fitz-Alwine muttered deep oaths of vengeance.

"Who giveth this woman?" asked the old palmer, laying his palsied hands on Christabel's head, as she knelt before him.

"Will you be so good as to answer, my Lord?" said Robin Hood.

"Father, I pray you!" besought the girl.

"No, no! a thousand times, no!" cried the Baron, beside himself with rage.

"Since her father hath refused to keep the solemn promise he gave," said Robin, "I will take his place. I, Robin Hood, do give the Lady Christabel as wife to the good Knight Sir Allan Clare."

The ceremony proceeded without further obstacle. Hardly were Allan Clare and Christabel wedded ere the Gamwell family appeared on the threshold. Robin Hood advanced to meet Marian, and led her to the altar, William and Maude following them. As he passed close to Robin, who knelt at Marian's side, Will whispered—

"At length, Rob, the happy day hath arrived. Look at Maude; how beautiful she is, and her dear little heart is beating fast, I warrant you."

"Silence, Will; God is listening to us at this moment."

"Yea, I know, and I am going to pray with my whole soul," replied the happy youth.

The palmer blessed the new couples, and, raising his hands to Heaven, implored the divine mercy upon them.

"Maude, dear Maude," said William, as soon as he was able to lead the girl from the Church, "at last you are my wife—my dear wife! Fate hath set so many obstacles in the way of our happiness, 'tis difficult for me now to realise its full extent. I am mad with joy; thou art mine, and mine alone. Hast prayed,

Maude, my darling? Hast asked the Holy Virgin to grant us for ever the same radiant joy she doth bestow on us this day?"

Maude smiled and wept together, so full was her heart of love and gratitude to William.

Robin's marriage threw the band of merrie men into transports of delight, and on issuing from the Church they uttered deafening cheers.

"The brawling ruffians," growled Lord Fitz-Alwine, reluctantly following the form of Little John, who had politely requested him to leave the Chapel.

A few minutes after the Chapel was deserted. Lord Fitz-Alwine and Sir Tristan, deprived of their horses, dolefully supporting each other, and in a state of mind which baffles description, set out for the Castle with halting steps.

"Fitz-Alwine," said the old man, stumbling as he spoke, "you will give me back the million pieces of gold which I confided to your care?"

"Nay, i'faith! Sir Tristan, for it was not my fault that misfortune befell you. Had you followed my counsels, this disaster would never have occurred. By holding the wedding in the Castle Chapel, our mutual desires would have been assured; but you preferred broad daylight to obscurity, and behold the result! This rascal hath carried off my daughter; I must have compensation, therefore I keep the gold."

Returning to Nottingham in as sorry a plight as their masters, the servants of the two noblemen followed them at a distance, laughing behind their backs at the strange events of the day.

The wedding party, escorted by the merrie men, soon gained the depths of the wood. The old Forest had decked itself out to receive the happy couples, and the trees, refreshed by the morning dew, bowed their green branches over the visitors. Long garlands of flowers and foliage were wreathed from tree to tree, and bound together secular oaks and sturdy elms and slender poplars. Here and there appeared in the distance a stag crowned with flowers like a classic god. A fawn, bedecked with ribbons, bounded across the path, or a deer, wearing its festive collar too, darted like an arrow along the greensward. In the midst of a wide clearing in the woods a table was spread, a dancing-

green levelled, and sports prepared—in short, all the pleasures that could add to the satisfaction of the guests were disposed around them. Most of the fair maids of Nottingham had come to grace with their presence the feast of Robin Hood, and the most frolic gaiety prevailed in the happy gathering.

Maude and William, arm in arm, with smiling lips and joyous hearts, were wandering apart down a green avenue near the dancing-green, when Friar Tuck appeared before them.

"Halloa, good Tuck, merry Giles, my fat brother," cried Will, laughing, "art come to share our stroll? Welcome! Giles, my very good friend, and do me the honour to look at the treasure of my soul—my cherished wife, my most precious possession; look at this angel, Giles, and tell me if there doth exist beneath the skies a more charming being than my beautiful Maude. But methinks, friend Tuck," added the young man, looking more closely at the Monk's anxious face—"methinks thou art ill at ease; what is it? Come, confide thy troubles to us; I will endeavour to cheer thee. Maude, my darling, let us be kind to him. Come, what is it, Giles? First, I will hear thy confidences, then I will speak to thee of my wife, and thine old heart will be young again in sympathy with mine."

"I have no confidences to make thee, Will," replied the Monk, in a somewhat broken voice, "but I rejoice to know that all thy desires are fulfilled."

"That doth not prevent me, friend Tuck, from remarking with real sorrow the sad expression of thy countenance. Come, what is it?"

"Naught," replied the Monk, "naught, unless it were an idea which crossed my mind, a will o' the wisp which burns into my brain, an elf which plagues my heart. Well, Will, I know not whether I should tell thee, but for many years I had hoped that the little witch whom thou dost hold so tenderly to thee would be my sun-beam, the joy of my existence, my dearest and most precious jewel."

"What, poor Tuck, until now thou hast loved my pretty Maude?"

"Yea, William."

"If I am not wrong, thou hast known her longer than Robin?"

"Than Robin? Yea, indeed."

"And hast loved her?"

"Alas, yea!" sighed the Monk.

"Could it be otherwise?" said Will, in a tender voice, kissing his wife's hand. "Robin loved her at first sight, I adored her from the first, and now, Maude, thou art mine."

Silence followed Will's passionate exclamation. The Monk bowed his head, and Maude blushed and smiled at her husband.

"I do hope, friend Tuck," continued William, in a tone of affection, "that my happiness is not thy pain; if I am happy to-day, it is by great tribulation that I have succeeded in making Maude my well-beloved wife. Thou hast not known the despair of rejected love; thou hast not known exile; thou hast not languished far from thy beloved; thou hast not lost thy strength, thy health, thy peace of mind."

As he enumerated the last of his sorrows, Will cast his eyes upon the rubicund countenance of the Monk, and a loud laugh burst from him. Friar Tuck weighed at least fifteen stone, and his expansive figure resembled a full moon. Maude, who had understood the cause of Will's sudden laughter, shared in his mirth, and Tuck joined in unaffectedly.

"I am quite well," he said, with a charming good nature; "but that makes no odds. . . . Well, no matter, I quite understand; and by'r lady, good friends," he added, taking the clasped hands of the young people in his own large ones, "I wish you both perfect happiness. 'Tis true, sweet Maude, your fawn-like eyes turned my head long ago; but there, it will not bear much thought. I have found a good moral to that chapter; I sought for a consolation in my cruel sorrow, and I found it."

"Found it!" cried William and Maude together.

"Yea," replied Tuck, with a smile.

"A black-eyed maid?" asked the coquettish Maude; "a young girl who can appreciate your good sterling qualities, Master Giles?"

The Monk began to laugh.

"Yea, truly," he said, "my consolation is a lady with brilliant eyes and ruby lips. You ask me, sweet Maude, if she appreciates my merits? That is a question difficult to resolve, for my consoler is truly a thoughtless creature, and I am not the only one to whom she renders kiss for kiss."



"And yet thou lovest her?" said Will, in a tone full at once of pity and reproach.

"Yea, I love her," replied the Monk; "albeit, as I have just told you, she is very free with her favours."

"But she must be a horrid woman," cried Maude, flushing.

"What, Tuck," added Will, "as brave a heart and as honest a soul as thine to be caught in the toils of such an infatuation! As for me, sooner than bestow my love on such a creature, I . . ."

"Tut! tut!" interrupted the Monk, mildly; "be careful, Will."

"Careful—why?"

"Because it ill becomes thee to speak evil of one whom thou hast oft embraced."

"You have embraced this woman!" cried Maude, in a reproachful voice.

"Maude, Maude, it is a lie!" said Will.

"It is not a lie," replied the Monk, tranquilly; "thou hast embraced her not once, but ten times, twenty times."

"Will, Will!"

"Never listen to him, Maude, he is deceiving you. Now, look here, Tuck, tell the truth. I have embraced the maid of thy love?"

"Yea, and I can prove it."

"You hear him, Will," said Maude, ready to weep.

"I hear him, but I do not understand him," replied the young man. "Giles, in the name of our good friendship, I adjure you to confront me with this maid, and we will see whether she hath the effrontery to sustain your imposture."

"I ask naught better, Will, and I wager that not only wilt thou be constrained to confess the affection thou dost bear her, but thou wilt eke give her fresh proofs of it, and thou wilt even embrace her."

"I do not wish him to do so," said Maude, twining her arms round Will; "I do not wish him to speak to this woman."

"He will speak to her and he will embrace her," replied the Monk, with strange persistency.

"'Tis impossible," said Will.

"Quite impossible," added Maude.

"Show me thy beloved, Master Giles. Where is she?"

"What mean you, Will?" said Maude. "You cannot desire her presence, and beside . . . and beside, Will, methinks the person of whom you speak would not be a proper acquaintance for your wife."

"Thou art right, dear little wife," said Will, kissing Maude's brow; "she is not worthy to look at thee for a moment. My dear Tuck," he continued, "thou wilt oblige me by ceasing a pleasantry which is so disagreeable to Maude. I have neither desire nor curiosity to see thy beloved, wherefore let us speak of her no more."

"But 'tis necessary for the honour of my word, Will, that thou shouldest be confronted with her."

"Not at all, not at all!" said Maude. "William doth not desire this meeting, and it would be too painful for me."

"I wish thee to see her," replied the obstinate Giles; "and here she is!" Saying which, Tuck drew from his robe a silver flask, and raising it to William's eyes, he said, "Look at my pretty bottle, my sweet consolation, and dare to say again that thou hast ne'er embraced her."

The two young people laughed merrily.

"I do confess my sin, good Tuck," cried Will, taking the bottle, "and I ask my dear little wife's permission to implant a kiss of friendship on the ruby lips of this old friend."

"Thou hast my consent, Will; drink to our happiness and the merry Monk's prosperity."

Will sipped the rosy fluid and returned the flask to Tuck, who in his enthusiasm drained it completely. The three friends then strolled about with linked arms until at a call from Robin they rejoined the assembly.

Robin had presented Much to Barbara, saying that this handsome young man was the long-promised husband. But Barbara had shaken her fair curls, saying that she did not want to marry yet.

Little John, who was not of a very expansive nature, was quite amiable that day. He showered attentions on his cousin Winifred, and it was easy to see that the two young people had many secrets to confide to each other, for they conversed in whispers, danced together all the time, and seemed unconscious of everything going on around them.

As for Christabel, her sweet face was radiant with happiness, but she was still so much affected by her abrupt separation from her father, so much enfeebled by her recent sufferings, that it was impossible for her to mix in the games. Seated near Allan Clare beneath a canopy, upon a

little hillock strewn with flowers, she looked like a young Queen presiding over a Royal feast given to her subjects.

Marian, tenderly supported by the arm of her husband, was walking on the dancing-green with him.

"I am coming to live near you, Robin," said the young wife, "and until the happy moment when you are restored to favour, I shall share the vicissitudes and loneliness of your existence."

"It were wiser, my dearest, to live at Barnsdale."

"No, Robin, my heart is with you, and I cannot leave my heart."

"I am proud to accept thy courageous devotion, dear wife, my sweet love," replied the young man with emotion, "and I will do all ever I can for thy satisfaction and happiness in thy new life."

In truth Robin Hood's wedding day was one of happiness and joy.

#### CHAPTER IV

MARIAN kept her word, and, despite Robin's mild objections, took up her abode under the great trees of Sherwood Forest. Allan Clare, who owned, as we have already said, a large house in the valley of Mansfield, could not prevail upon his sister to come and live in it with Christabel; for Marian was firmly resolved not to leave her husband.

Immediately after his wedding, the Knight had offered to sell his Huntingdonshire estates to King Henry II. at two-thirds of their value, on condition of his marriage with Lady Christabel Fitz-Alwine being confirmed by letters patent. The King, who always seized with avidity any opportunity of acquiring the richest domains in England for the Crown, accepted the offer, and, by a special act, confirmed the marriage of the two young people. Allan Clare had made his application with such adroitness and promptitude, and the King was so eager to close the bargain, that all was completed by the time the Bishop of Hereford and Baron Fitz-Alwine arrived at Court.

It is hardly necessary to remark that the Bishop and the Norman Baron stirred up the Royal anger against Robin Hood to the utmost. At their urgent request, Henry gave the Bishop leave to seize the

person of the hardy outlaw, and to put him to death without delay or mercy.

Whilst the two Normans were conspiring thus against Robin Hood, the latter, at the height of his bliss, was living quietly and without a care beneath the good green trees of Sherwood Forest.

Will Scarlett was the happiest man in all the world, in the possession of his well-beloved Maude. Gifted with a vivid imagination, Will had imagined eternal bliss as consisting in a wife like Maude, and in his eyes she was endowed with all the charms of an angel. Maude was aware of this flattering affection, and she strove to remain upon the pedestal to which her husband's love had elevated her. Following the example set by Robin Hood and Marian, Will and his wife had made their home in the Forest, and they all lived there together in the greatest harmony.

Robin Hood loved the fair sex, firstly from natural inclination, and secondly out of regard for the charming creature who bore his name. Robin Hood's companions shared his feelings of respect and veneration towards women; and thus the maidens of the neighbourhood were able to traverse the Forest paths without fear of molestation. If by chance they encountered any of the band, they were asked to partake of refreshment, and afterwards they were given an escort through the wood, and no cause for complaint had ever arisen. When the kindly courtesy of the Foresters became known, its renown travelled afar, and many a bright-eyed maiden with light heart and tripping feet had ventured among the dells and glades of Sherwood.

On Robin's wedding day, a number of these young maidens joined in the festivities, and gazed admiringly at the handsome couple. As they danced, these fair daughters of Eve cast furtive glances at their gallant swains, and were only surprised to think that they had ever feared them for a single moment, whispering to each other that it must be very delightful to share the adventurous loves of the hardy outlaws. In the innocence of their young hearts they allowed these secret wishes to appear, and the enraptured Foresters, making the best use of their time, the beautiful maidens of Nottingham found that the language of Robin Hood's Merrie Men was no less irresistibly eloquent than their eyes.



The result of all this was that Friar Tuck became overwhelmed with work, being occupied from morning to night in solemnising marriages. Very naturally the good Monk was anxious to discover whether these multiple unions were not an epidemic of a peculiar character, and how many people would still succumb to it. But his question remained unanswered. Having attained its zenith, the rage for marriages abated, and the cases became fewer. Nevertheless, it is curious to observe that the symptoms are still as violent, and that they continue even to our own day.

The little colony in the Forest lived very merrily. The cave of which we have spoken had been divided into cells and rooms which served only for bed-chambers, the vast glades serving as drawing and dining-rooms, and it was only in winter that they had recourse to their subterranean retreat. It is difficult to imagine how quiet and peaceful was the life these men led. Nearly all were of Saxon origin and attached to one another like members of one family; most of them had suffered cruel oppression at the hands of the Norman invaders.

Robin Hood's band levied tribute most particularly upon two classes of society: the rich Norman nobles and the clergy. On the first because they had robbed the Saxons of their titles and patrimony, and on the second because they were continually augmenting their already considerable riches at the expense of the people. Robin Hood levied imposts on the Normans, and though such contributions were heavy, they were exacted without combat or bloodshed. The orders of the young Chief were strictly carried out, for disobedience meant death. The severity of this discipline had earned an excellent reputation for Robin Hood's band, whose loyal and chivalrous character was well known. Many expeditions were undertaken vainly to try and oust the Merrie men from their retreat; but the authorities, wearied at last by their fruitless endeavours, ceased to harass them, and Henry II.'s indifference finally compelled the Normans to submit to the dangerous vicinity of their enemies.

Marian found her forest life even more agreeable than she had dared to hope; she was born (as she laughingly said) to be Queen of this merry tribe. The respectful homage, affection, and devotion

lavished on Robin were extremely flattering to Marian, and she was proud to depend on the valiant young man's protecting arm. If Robin Hood knew how to gain and keep the affection of his followers by showing towards every man a consistent kindness and sincere friendship, he could also exert absolute authority over them.

The beautiful Forest held a thousand pleasures for Marian. Now she wandered with her husband through the picturesque windings of the wood, anon she found amusement in the sports and games then in vogue. Thanks to Robin's care, she possessed a rare and valuable flock of falcons, and she learnt to fly them with a tried and skilful hand. But the sport which Marian loved best was archery; with indefatigable patience Robin initiated his young wife into all the mysteries of the art. Marian attended carefully to the lessons given her, and never was pupil more apt. She thus became in a short time an archer of the first rank. It was a pleasing sight to Robin and his Merrie Men to watch Marian, bow in hand, clad in a tunic of Lincoln green, her majestic and supple figure slightly bent, her left hand holding the bow, while her right, curving gracefully, drew the arrow to her ear. When Marian had mastered all the secrets of the art which had made Robin so famous, she acquired a like renown. The young woman's inimitable skill roused the admiration and respect of the inhabitants of the Forest to the utmost, and the allies of the band and the citizens of the towns of Mansfield and Nottingham came in crowds to witness her prowess.

A year slipped by—a year of joy, happiness, bliss. Allan-a-Dale (we will now speak of the Knight by the name of his property) had become a father; Heaven had blessed him with a daughter. Robin and William each rejoiced in a handsome son, and a round of dances and general rejoicings celebrated these happy events.

One morning Robin Hood with Will Scarlett and Little John met beneath a tree called the "trysting-tree," because it served as the rallying-point of the band, when they heard a faint sound in the distance.

"Hark!" said Robin, quickly. "'Tis a horse I hear in the clearing; go see whether we may expect a guest. You take me, Little John?"

"Perfectly. And I will bring back the rider, an he prove worthy to share your repast."

"He will be twice welcome," laughed Robin, "for I begin to feel the pangs of hunger."

Little John and Will glided through the thicket toward the road taken by the traveller, and soon came near enough to distinguish him.

"By the holy Mass, the poor devil hath a sorry look, and I dare swear his fortune causeth him but little embarrassment."

"I must e'en avow the Knight doth wear a grievous air," replied Little John; "but perchance the poverty of his outer man is but a clever artifice. The traveller trusteth to his seeming misery to traverse the Forest with impunity. We will teach him that, an he incline to trickery, we are his match in cunning."

Though habited in the garb of a Knight, the traveller at a first glance inspired a feeling of pity. His clothes hung on him anyhow, as though adversity had made him careless of appearances; the hood of his cloak hung round his neck; and his head, bowed in thought, bore evidence of extreme wretchedness. The deep bass voice of Little John roused the stranger suddenly from his reverie.

"Good day, Sir Stranger!" cried our friend, advancing to meet the traveller; "art welcome to the green wood. Thou hast been anxiously awaited."

"Awaited?" asked the stranger, fixing his sad gaze upon John's broad countenance.

"Yea, Sir Knight," replied Will Scarlett; "our master bade us seek thee, and for three hours he hath awaited thine arrival, ere commencing his meal."

"No one doth expect me," replied the stranger, with a troubled air. "You are mistaken; I am not the guest whom your master expects."

"I ask pardon, Master, but 'tis indeed thou. He had learnt thou wouldst be coming through the Forest to-day."

"Impossible, impossible," repeated the stranger.

"We speak the truth," returned Will.

"May I ask the name of one who shows such courtesy toward a poor traveller?"

"It is Robin Hood," replied Little John, hiding a smile.

"Robin Hood, the famous outlaw?" questioned the stranger, in evident surprise.

"Himself, Master."

"I have long heard tell of him," added the stranger, "and his noble conduct hath inspired in me a true regard for him. I am much pleased to have a chance of meeting Robin Hood; he hath a loyal and faithful heart. I will accept his kind invitation with pleasure, though I am at a loss to understand how he was aware of my journey through his domains."

"He will be glad to inform thee of that himself," replied Little John.

"As you will, brave Forester. Lead the way; I will follow in your steps."

Little John took the traveller's horse by the bridle, and conducted him into the path leading to the cross-road where Robin still remained. Will followed as rear-guard.

Little John did not doubt for a single moment but that this semblance of grief and poverty was a mask to serve as passport in case of an unwelcome encounter, whilst Will divined, more correctly perhaps, that the traveller was really and truly a poor man from whom they would obtain no other satisfaction than that of seeing him eat a right good dinner.

The stranger and his guides soon found Robin Hood. The latter saluted the new-comer, and, struck by his dejected appearance, watched him narrowly, whilst the other strove to readjust in some measure his poor clothing. An air of the greatest distinction accompanied all his movements, and Robin soon arrived at the same conclusion as Little John, that the stranger affected this careworn melancholy and these tattered garments as a safeguard to his purse.

Nevertheless, the young Chief received the dejected stranger with great kindness, offering him a seat, while he ordered one of his men to look after his guest's horse.

A delicious repast was spread upon the green turf, which is thus described in the words of an old ballad:—

"And then with wine and manchet bread  
And mumbrils of the roe,  
They feasted, while the Malmsey wine  
Around the board did flow.  
And many a sylvan guest was there,  
With feathered minstrels of the air."

As we have remarked, despite the miserable appearance of his guest, Robin did not fail in hospitality toward him. If sorrow sharpens the appetite, we must say that the stranger was full of woe. He attacked the dishes with all the ardour



of a stomach that has been empty for twenty-four hours, and the meats disappeared with great draughts of wine which bore witness to the excellence of the liquid, or to the weakening effect of sorrow.

After the repast Robin and his guest stretched themselves beneath the majestic shade of the great trees, and conversed without reserve. The Knight's opinions of men and matters raised him high in Robin's estimation, and, notwithstanding his miserable bearing, the young Chief could not believe in the sincerity of his apparent misery. Of all vices Robin most disliked dissimulation; his frank and open nature hated cunning. Therefore, in spite of the real esteem with which the Knight inspired him, he resolved to make him pay heavily for his repast. An opportunity for putting this determination into effect soon presented itself, for, after having railed against human ingratitude, the stranger added—

"I have so great a scorn for this vice that it doth no longer astonish me; but I can affirm that never in all my life have I been guilty of it myself. Allow me, Robin Hood, to thank you with all my heart for your friendly reception of me, and if ever a lucky chance should lead you into the neighbourhood of St. Mary's Abbey, forget not that at the Castle of the Plain you will ever find a loving and cordial hospitality."

"Sir Knight," replied the young man, "those whom I receive in the Forest never undergo the danger of a visit from me. To those who are really in need of a good meal I willingly give a place at my table; but I am less generous toward travellers who have the wherewithal to pay for my hospitality. I fear to wound the pride of a man favoured by fortune, and if I give him of my venison and wine for naught. I find it more pleasant both for him and myself to say, 'This Forest is an inn, I am the host, my Merrie Men the servants. As noble guests, pay liberally for your refreshment.'"

The Knight began to laugh.

"That is," said he, "a mighty pleasant way of looking at things, and an ingenious fashion of levying tribute. I heard tell, not many days ago, of the courteous way in which you eased travellers of their superfluous wealth, but I have never had so clear an explanation as this."

"Well, Sir Knight, I am about to

complete the explanation," saying which Robin took up a hunting horn and raised it to his lips. Little John and Will Scarlett appeared in answer to his summons. "Sir Knight," Robin Hood went on, "the hospitality comes to an end; be so good as to pay the shot, my manacles stand ready to receive it."

"Since you consider the Forest as an inn, the charges are no doubt in proportion to its extent?" said the Knight, in a calm voice.

"Just so, Master."

"You receive knights, barons, dukes, and peers of the realm at the same price?"

"Yea, at the same price," replied Robin Hood, "and it is but just. You would not wish, I imagine, that a poor peasant like myself should entertain gratuitously an emblazoned knight, an earl, a duke, or a prince; it would be contrary to all rules of breeding."

"You are perfectly right, good host, but you will have but a sad opinion of your guest, when he tells you that his entire fortune consists in ten pistoles."

"Permit me to doubt that assertion, Sir Knight," replied Robin.

"My dear host, I invite your companions to prove the truth of my statement by searching me."

Little John, who rarely allowed an opportunity of demonstrating his social position to escape him, hastened to obey.

"The Knight speaks truth," he cried, with a disappointed air; "he hath but ten pistoles."

"And that small sum doth represent all my fortune at present," added the stranger.

"Have you, then, consumed your inheritance?" asked Robin, with a laugh, "or was that inheritance of so little value?"

"My patrimony was considerable," replied the Knight, "and I have not squandered it."

"How, then, are you so poor? for you will own that your present situation looks hopeless enow."

"Appearances sometimes err, and to make you understand my misfortunes it would be necessary to recount to you a very sad story."

"Sir Knight, I will give you my best attention, and should it be in my power to help you, make use of me."

"I am aware, noble Robin Hood, that

you generously extend your protection to the oppressed, and that they have claims on your warm sympathy."

"Spare me, Master, I pray you," interrupted Robin, "and let us concern ourselves with your affairs."

"My name is Richard," continued the stranger, "and my family is descended from King Ethelred."

"You are a Saxon, then?" said the young man.

"Yea, and the nobility of my birth hath been the cause of much misfortune."

"Suffer me to shake a brother's hand," replied Robin, with a merry smile on his lips. "Saxons, rich or poor, are freely welcome to the Forest of Sherwood."

The Knight responded cordially to his host's hand-clasp, and continued thus:—

"I was given the surname of Sir Richard of the Plain from the situation of my Castle in the centre of a vast moorland about two miles from St. Mary's Abbey. While still quite young I was married to a maid whom I had loved from my earliest childhood. Heaven blessed our union and sent us a son. Never did parents love their child as we loved our little Herbert, and never was child more love-worthy. Our proximity to the Abbey had led to frequent intercourse, and a great intimacy had sprung up betwixt the Brothers and myself. One day a Brother toward whom I had shown much sympathy asked me for a few minutes' conversation, and taking me aside spoke thus:—

"Sir Richard, I am about to take irrevocable vows. I am about to quit the world for ever. Beside her mother's tomb I leave a poor orphan, defenceless and penniless. I am for ever dedicated to God, and I trust that the austerity of the Cloister will give me the courage to support the burden of life a few years longer. I come to ask you in the name of Divine Providence to have pity on my poor little daughter."

"My dear brother," said I to the unhappy man, "I thank you for your confidence, and since you have placed your trust in me, that trust shall not be betrayed; your daughter shall become mine."

"The Brother, moved to tears by what he called my generosity, thanked me warmly and, at my request, sent for his little daughter.

"I have never experienced any emotion like that produced by the sight of this child.

"She was twelve years old, with a willowy, graceful figure, and long blonde tresses covered her pretty shoulders with their silken curls. On entering the room where I was waiting, she greeted me prettily, fixing upon me two large blue eyes full of sadness. As you may imagine, good host, this charming little maid quite won my heart; I took her hands in mine, and implanted on her brow a fatherly kiss.

"You see, Sir Richard," said the Monk, 'this sweet child is worthy of affection.'

"Yea, truly, Brother, and I avow that never in my life have mine eyes rested upon so charming a being."

"Lilias is very like her mother," replied the Monk, 'and the sight of her adds to my sorrow; she takes my mind from heavenly things and carries back my thoughts to the sweet creature sleeping yonder within the cold tomb. Adopt my sweet child, Sir Richard; you will never regret your charitable action. Lilias doth possess excellent qualities and a good temper; she is pious, sweet, and good.'

"I will be a father to her, a tender father," I replied with emotion.

"The poor little girl heard us with an air of surprise, and looking anxiously from her father to me with her large blue eyes, she said—

"Father, you wish . . ."

"I only wish your happiness, my darling child," replied the Monk. 'Our separation hath become imperative.'

"I will not attempt to depict the painful scene which followed or the long explanations given by the Monk to his heart-broken child. He wept with her, until, at a sign from the unhappy man, I took Lilias in my arms and bore her from the Monastery.

"During the first days after her arrival, at the Castle, Lilias was sad and troubled, then time and the companionship of my son Herbert appeared to calm her sorrow. The two children grew up together, and when Lilias had attained her sixteenth, and Herbert his twentieth year, I could plainly see that they loved each other with a more tender love.

"These young hearts," I said to my wife, after having made this discovery, 'have never known sorrow; let us protect them against its attacks. Herbert adores Lilias, and on her part Lilias loves our dear son passionately. What matters it to us that Lilias is of lowly birth? Though her father was once only a poor Saxon peasant, he



is now a holy man. Thanks to our care, Liliass possesses all the qualities which are an appanage of her sex; she loves Herbert, and will make him a good wife.'

"My wife consented with all her heart to the marriage of her two children, and we betrothed them that same day.

"The day fixed for the happy union was approaching, when a Norman Knight, owner of a small fief in Lancashire, came to pay a visit to the Abbey of St. Mary. This Norman had seen and admired my house, and was seized with a desire to possess it himself. Without disclosing this covetousness, he learned that I had under my paternal care a pretty girl of marriageable age; and rightly supposing that a portion of my wealth would be given to Liliass as her dowry, the Norman appeared at my gate, and under pretext of visiting the Castle, he managed to gain an entrance into our family circle. As I told you, Robin, Liliass was very beautiful, and the sight of her fired my guest's imagination; he repeated his visit, and confided to me his love for my son's betrothed. Without rejecting the Norman's honourable proposal, I told him of the engagement already made by the maiden, adding at the same time that Liliass was free to bestow her hand where she would.

"He then spoke to the girl herself. Liliass' refusal was kind but firm; she loved Herbert.

"The Norman left the Castle in a rage, swearing to have his revenge for what he called our insolence.

"At first we only laughed at his threats, but we learnt by experience how serious they were. Two days after the departure of the Norman, the eldest son of one of my vassals came to tell me that he had met, some four miles from the Castle, the stranger who had lately been my guest, carrying in his arms my poor unhappy child. This news caused us terrible distress. I could hardly believe it, but the young man gave me irrefutable proofs of the calamity.

"‘Sir Richard,’ he said to me, ‘my words are only too true, and it was thus that I became assured that Mistress Liliass had been abducted. I was seated at the side of the road when a horseman, bearing before him a weeping woman and followed by his squire, stopped a few paces from me. The harness of his horse was broken, and with angry threats he called me to his assistance. I

approached; Mistress Liliass wrung her hands. ‘Arrange this bridle,’ said the Knight, gruffly to me. I obeyed, and without being perceived, I cut the girths of the saddle; then, whilst pretending to examine the horse's shoes, I managed to slip a pebble into his hoof. Having done which, I fled to warn you.’

"My son Herbert could tarry to listen to no more, but away to the stables, saddled a horse, and set off at topmost speed.

"The young peasant's trick had been successful. When Herbert overtook the Norman, he had dismounted. Then there was a terrible fight between the villain and my son, in which right conquered, and my son killed the ravisher.

"Soon as ever the Norman's death became known, a troop of soldiers was sent to arrest Herbert. I hid him and sent a humble petition to the King. I made known to His Majesty the Norman's infamous conduct; I pointed out to him that my son had fought with his enemy, and had killed him while exposing himself to a like fate. The King made me buy my son's pardon at the price of a considerable ransom. Only too happy to obtain mercy, I hastened to satisfy the King's demands. My coffers emptied, I appealed to my vassals, and sold my plate and furniture. My last resources exhausted, I still required four hundred gold crowns. The Abbot of Saint Mary's then offered to lend the required sum on mortgage, and it is hardly necessary to add that I gladly accepted his kind offer. The conditions of the loan were as follows: A pretended sale of my estates would give him the rents for one year. If on the last day of the twelfth month of this year I do not repay him the four hundred gold crowns, all my goods will remain his. That is my position, good host," added the Knight—"the day of reckoning approaches, and my whole fortune consists of ten pistoles."

"Do you think that the Abbot of Saint Mary's will not give you time to free yourself?" asked Robin Hood.

"I am unfortunately but too sure that he will not give me an hour, a minute. If he be not reimbursed to the last crown, my estates will remain in his hands. Alas! I am indeed in a sorry plight; my beloved wife will have no home, my children no food. Could I suffer alone, I should take courage; but to watch the sufferings of

those I love is too great a trial of my strength. I have asked help from those who called themselves my friends in the day of prosperity, and have received an icy refusal from some, indifference from others. I have no friends, Robin Hood; I am alone."

As he finished speaking, the Knight hid his face in his trembling hands, and a convulsive sob escaped him.

"Sir Richard," said Robin Hood, "your story is a sad one; but you must not despair of God's goodness; He watcheth over you, and I believe you are on the point of obtaining heavenly succour."

"Alas!" sighed the Knight, "could I but obtain a delay, I might be able to pay off the debt. Unfortunately the only security I can offer is a vow to the Virgin."

"I will take that security," replied Robin Hood; "and, in the revered name of the Mother of God, our holy patroness, I will lend you the four hundred golden crowns you lack."

The Knight uttered a cry.

"You, Robin Hood! Ah! bless you a thousand times. I swear with all the sincerity of a grateful heart loyally to repay the money."

"I will count on it, Sir Knight. Little John," Robin added, "you know where to find our horde, since you are treasurer of the Forest; go seek me four hundred crowns. As for you, Will, go look in my wardrobe and see whether there be not a garment worthy of our guest there."

"In truth, Robin Hood, your goodness is so great . . ." cried the Knight.

"Peace, peace," interrupted Robin, laughingly. "We have just entered upon an agreement, and I must honour you as the envoy of the Holy Virgin. Will, add to the clothes some ells of fine cloth; put new harness on the grey horse which the Bishop of Hereford committed to our care; and, Will, my friend, add to these modest gifts all that your inventive mind can think of as necessary to a Knight."

Little John and Will hastened to accomplish their mission.

"Cousin," said John, "thy hands be nimbler than mine, count the money whilst I measure the cloth; my bow will serve for yard measure."

"Certes," replied Will, with a laugh, "the measure will be good."

"It will, as thou shalt see."

Little John took his bow in one hand,

unrolled the piece of cloth with the other' and set himself to measure, not by ells' but exactly by bow lengths.

Will burst out laughing.

"Go on, friend John, go on; wilt soon come to an end of the whole piece, an thou go on giving three yards for one. Well done!"

"Hold thy tongue, thou prating fool. Dost not know that Robin would give even more, an he were in our place?"

"Then will I add a few crowns," said William.

"A few handfuls, cousin; we will recover it from the Normans."

"Well, I have finished."

When Robin saw the generosity of John and Will, he smiled, and thanked them by a look.

"Sir Knight," said Will, putting the gold into the Knight's hand, "each roll contains one hundred crowns."

"But there are six rolls, my young friend."

"You are mistaken, Sir Guest; there are but four. And, after all, what matter? Put the money in your purse, and say no more on't."

"When shall I repay it?" asked the Knight.

"One year from this, day for day, an that will suit you, and I am still of this world," said Robin.

"Agreed."

"Beneath this tree."

"I will attend punctually, Robin Hood," replied the Knight, as he wrung the young Chief's hand with effusive gratitude. "But ere we part, let me tell you that all the praises lavished on you cannot equal those which fill my heart; you have saved more than my life; you have saved my wife and children."

"Master," replied Robin Hood, "you are a Saxon, and that name alone doth give you a claim upon my friendship; beside which, you have another interest for me—that of distress. I am what men call a robber, a thief—so be it! But an I extort money from the rich, I take naught from the poor. I detest violence, and I shed no blood; I love my country, and the Norman race is odious to me because to usurpation they have added tyranny. Nay, never thank me; I have done but my duty; you had naught, and I gave to you—'tis only just."

"Say what you will, your conduct toward me is noble and generous; you,



a stranger, have done more for me than all they which call themselves my friends. May God bless you, Robin, for you have brought joy to my heart. At all times and in every place I shall be your debtor, and I pray Heaven to enable me to prove my gratitude some day. Farewell, Robin Hood! farewell, true friend! In one year I will return to pay my debt."

"Farewell, Sir Knight," replied Robin, shaking his guest warmly by the hand; "and should fate bring me to a pass where I need your help, believe me, I shall not fail to ask it without compunction or reserve."

"May God hear you! My greatest hope is that I may be able to assist you."

Sir Richard wrung the hands of Will and Little John, and bestrode the Bishop of Hereford's dapple grey. The Knight's own mount, laden with Robin Hood's presents, was to follow its master.

As Robin Hood watched his temporary guest disappear at a bend of the road, he said to his companions, "We have made a man happy; the day hath been well spent."

## CHAPTER V

MARIAN and Maude had been living at Barnsdale Hall for a month past, and they could not return to their old mode of life until their health was quite re-established, for it must not be forgotten that the young women had become mothers.

But Robin Hood could not endure the prolonged absence of his beloved companion, and one day, carrying with him part of his band, he took up his abode in Barnsdale Forest. William, who had naturally followed his young chief, soon declared that the subterranean dwelling, constructed hastily in the neighbourhood of the Hall, was infinitely preferable to that in the great Forest of Sherwood; or, at least, if it wanted certain things to complete the well-being of the troop, the proximity of Barnsdale Hall was a very agreeable compensation.

Robin and William were enchanted at their change of abode, and two young people of our acquaintance shared in their unreserved satisfaction for the same reason; these two young men were Little John and Much Cackle, the miller's son. Robin soon perceived that Little John

and Much were absent at all hours of the day without apparent motive. These absences became so frequent that Robin wished to know the cause of them. He made inquiries, and learnt that his cousin Winifred, being very fond of walking, had asked Little John to show her the most noteworthy parts of the Forest. "Good!" said Robin. "So much for Little John; now for Much." He was told that Barbara, sharing her sister's curiosity as to the beauties of the country, had wished to accompany her in these woodland rambles; but that Little John, with praiseworthy prudence, had told the young girl that the responsibility of looking after the one lady was already very great, and that it was impossible for him to accept her company and the extra responsibility involved thereby. Consequently, Much offered his protection to Mistress Barbara, and she accepted it. So the two couples wandered among the trees and into the most mysterious and gloomy recesses of the woods, talking the while of no one knows what. They forgot to look at the objects they had come to see; and the old gnarled oaks, the beeches with their graceful boughs, the secular elms, passed before their eyes without attracting the least attention. Then a coincidence, stranger even than this indifference to the beauties of nature, always led them to remote paths, and they never met till they came to the gate of the Hall as the stars began to peep out.

These walks, repeated daily, sufficiently explained to Robin the absence of his two companions.

It was the evening of a scorching day, and a warm zephyr fanned the air, when Marian and Maude, leaning on the arms of Robin and William, set out from the Hall to take a long walk in the fragrant glades of the Forest. Winifred and Barbara followed the two young couples, while Little John and his inseparable friend Much shadowed the two sisters.

"Here I can breathe," said Marian, holding up her pale face to the breeze. "There seems no air in a room, and I long to return to the Forest once again."

"Then life in the woods is very pleasant?" questioned Mistress Barbara.

"Yea," replied Marian; "there is so much sunshine, light, shade, flowers, and foliage."

"Much told me yesterday," continued Barbara, "that Sherwood Forest doth

surpass Barnsdale in beauty; but if that is so, it must contain all the marvels of creation, for here we have the most bewitching spots."

"You think Barnsdale Wood very pretty, then, Barbara?" said Robin, concealing a smile.

"It is charming," replied the girl, vivaciously; "there are such beautiful views in it."

"Which part of the wood particularly attracts your attention, cousin?"

"I cannot well reply to your question, Robin; but I think I prefer a valley, which I am certain hath not its equal in old Sherwood Forest."

"And where is this valley?"

"Some distance from here. But you can imagine nothing fresher, more still, or more fragrant than that little spot. Picture to yourself, cousin, a large lawn with sloping sides, on the summit of which all kinds of trees grow in profusion. The different varieties of leaves lit up by the sunshine take on marvellous aspects; now you see before you a curtain of emeralds, anon a veil of multitudinous colours unrolls itself beneath your gaze. The turf which covers this dell is like a large green carpet without a wrinkle to break its smooth surface. Scatter flowers of purple and gold and all the colours of the rainbow over the declivities beneath the trees, imagine a slender thread of water rippling through the shady ravine, and you will have before you the oasis of Barnsdale Forest. And then," continued the girl, "the stillness is so great in this delicious spot, the air one breathes so pure, that the heart swells with joy—in very truth I have never in all my life seen so ravishing a place."

"And where is this enchanted valley, Barbara?" asked Winifred, innocently.

"Oh! then you do not always walk about together?" interrupted Robin, with a smile.

"Yea," added Winifred; "only we always lose each other—no, I mean to say very often—at least sometimes. I mean to say that Little John loses the way, and then we get separated; we seek for each other, but I do not know how it happens that we never meet until we arrive at the Hall. This continual separation is quite accidental, I assure you."

"Yea, truly; quite accidental," Robin returned mockingly; "and no one supposes the contrary. Then why blush,

Barbara? Why look down, Winifred? Look at John and Much, neither of them is embarrassed; they know so well that you get lost in the wood without meaning it."

"Yea, i'faith!" answered Much; "and knowing Mistress Barbara's fancy for quiet and retired spots, I took her to the little valley which she hath just described."

"I am forced to believe," said Robin, "that Barbara doth possess a great talent for observation to have been able to take in at one glance all the charming details which she hath just depicted. But tell me, Barbara, did you not find in this oasis of Barnsdale—as you call the vale discovered by Much—something still more charming yet than the trees with varied green, the verdant sward, the murmuring stream and the many-hued flowers?"

Barbara blushed.

"I do not know what you mean, cousin."

"Oh, indeed! Much will understand better than you, I hope. Come now, Much, answer frankly: Hath not Barbara forgotten to tell us of some charming episode connected with your visit to this terrestrial paradise?"

"What episode, Robin?" asked the young man, with the shadow of a smile.

"My discreet friend," replied Robin, "have you never known two young people, attracted by one another, go alone to this delicious retreat, the memory of which is engraved on Barbara's heart?"

Much blushed painfully.

"Well," continued Robin, "two young people, intimate acquaintances of mine, visited your terrestrial paradise a few days ago. Arrived on the flowering banks of the little stream, they seated themselves side by side. At first they admired the landscape, listened to the song of the birds; then for some minutes they remained blind and dumb; then the youth, emboldened by the solitude, the stirring silence of his trembling companion, took her two little hands in his. The maiden did not raise her eyes, but she blushed, and this blush spoke for her. Then, in a voice which to the girl sounded sweeter than the song of birds, more melodious than the murmur of the breeze, the young man said to her, 'There is no one in all the world I love so much as you; I would rather die than lose your love; and if you will be my wife, you will make me the happiest of men.' Tell me, Barbara," added Robin, with a smile,



"do you know whether the maiden granted her lover's fervent prayer?"

"Make no reply to such a very indiscreet question, Barbara!" cried Marian.

"Speak for Barbara, Much," said Robin.

"You ask us such strange questions," replied the young man, strongly inclined to believe that Robin had overheard his *tête-à-tête* with Barbara, "that it is impossible to gather what they mean."

"I' faith, Much," said William, "me-seemeth Robin speaks truth, and, judging by your abashed looks and the brilliant colour which o'erspreads my sister's face, you are the lovers of the vale. Upon my word, Barbara, if they call me Will Scarlett because of my ruddy locks, they might e'en call thee Barbara Scarlett, for thy face is well-nigh purple. Is't not so, Maude?"

"Master William," said Barbara, with an air of displeasure, "if thou wert within reach of mine hand, I would have much pleasure in pulling out a handful of thine ugly locks."

"Thou mightest well behave so, an those same locks grew on any head save mine," said William, throwing a look at Much; "but thy brother's head is unassailable. It hath its own particular tyrant—eh, Maude?"

"Yea, Will; but I never pull your hair out."

"That will come, little wife."

"Never," said Maude, with a laugh.

"Then, Much, thou wilt not tell me what answer the maiden gave thee?"

"If you should e'er meet that maiden, you can ask her yourself, Robin."

"I will not fail. And you, Little John, do you know any youth who loves a *tête-à-tête* with a charming lady?"

"Nay, Robin, but if you wish to know these lovers, I will strive to discover them for you," replied Little John, naïvely.

"I have just thought of something, John," cried Will, bursting out a-laughing. "These lovers of whom Robin speaks are not unknown to thee, and I dare wager what thou wilt that the young man in question might be called my cousin, while the maiden is a sweet lady of this neighbourhood."

"Art wrong, Will," answered John; "it is naught to do with me."

"Certes, I am on the wrong track," returned Will, with a smile; "it could not have been thou, for thou hast never been in love."

"I beg thy pardon, Will," replied the giant, tranquilly. "I love with all my heart, and have long done so, a beautiful and charming maid."

"Ha! ha!" cried Will. "Little John in love; here's something new!"

"And why should not Little John be in love?" asked the youth, good-humouredly. "I ween there is naught extraordinary in that."

"Naught at all, my good friend. I like to see all the world happy, and love is happiness; but, by St. Paul! I should very much like to see thy lady love."

"My lady love!" exclaimed the other. "But who could that be save thine own sister Winifred, Cousin Will? Thy sister, whom I have loved from childhood as you love Maude, or Much loves Barbara."

A general shout of laughter greeted John's frankness, and Winifred, overwhelmed with congratulations, threw a look of tender reproach at the young giant.

"Ah, ha! Much," Robin resumed, "sooner or later truth will out. I hit the mark in fixing upon thee as the hero of the little scene enacted in Barnsdale Wood."

"You witnessed it, then?" asked Much.

"Nay; but I guessed it, or, rather, I recalled mine own impressions. The same thing happened to me a year ago; Marian had enticed me . . ."

"What, I enticed you?" cried the young wife. "I would have you remember that it was *you*, Robin, and had I foreseen then how you would treat me after our marriage . . ."

"What would you have done in that case?" interrupted Barbara.

"I should have married all the sooner, dear Barbara," replied the young wife, smiling at her husband.

"There, I hope that is an answer which will encourage the confidence of which you have already given secret proof, saucy Barbara. Come, make a clean breast of it; we are all one family. Tell us that you love Much, and Much on his part will avow the same."

"Yea, I will avow it," cried Much, with deep emotion. "I will cry aloud, 'I love Barbara Gamwell with all my strength.' I will say to all who will listen, 'Barbara's eyes are the light of my day, her sweet thrilling voice echoes in mine ears like the harmonious notes of singing birds;"

I prefer the company of my dear Barbara to the pleasures of the feast and the elation of the dance beneath the green leaves of spring; I would rather a tender look from her eyes, a smile from her lips or the pressure of her little hand, than all the riches of the world. I am entirely devoted to Barbara, and sooner than do anything to annoy her, I would e'en ask the Sheriff of Nottingham to send me to the gallows.' Yea, good friends, I love the dear maid, and I call down all the holy blessings of Heaven upon her fair head. If she will give me the happiness of protecting her with my name and life, she shall be happy and very, very tenderly beloved."

"Hurrah!" cried Will, throwing his cap into the air, "'tis right well spoken. Dry your eyes, little sister, and I give you permission to present your pink—nay, scarlet—cheeks to this brave wooer. If, instead of being a lusty lad, I were but a feeble maiden, and I had heard such sweet things said, I should have already given my hand and heart to my lover. Would you not have done the same, Maude? You know you would."

"Nay, Will, modesty . . ."

"We are a family party, there is no need to blush at so natural an action. I am assured, Maude, that you are of mine own opinion. If I were Much and you were Barbara, you would be already in mine arms, and I should embrace you with all my heart."

"I am on William's side," said Robin, smiling a little maliciously. "Barbara must give us a proof of her affection for Much."

Thus called on, the maiden advanced to the centre of the merry group, and said timidly—

"I sincerely believe in the love which Much doth bear me, and I am very grateful to him for it. In return I must avow that . . . that . . ."

"That you love him as much as he loves thee," added Will, quickly. "Your speech is slow to-day, little sister. I assure you it took me much less time to make Maude understand that I loved her with my whole heart, did it not, Maude?"

"That is true, Will," replied the young wife.

"Much," continued William, more seriously, "I give thee sweet Barbara to wife; she doth possess all the qualities of

a true heart, and thou wilt be a happy husband. Barbara, my love, Much is a good man, a brave Saxon, true as steel. He will never disappoint thy tender hopes; he will love thee for ever."

"For ever and ever," cried Much, taking the hands of his betrothed in his.

"Embrace thy future wife, friend Much," said Will.

The young man obeyed, and, despite Mistress Gamwell's pretended resistance, he touched her crimson cheeks with his lips.

The Knight gave his consent to the marriage of his daughters, and the date of the double wedding was fixed forthwith.

Next morning Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlett were gathered, with about a hundred of their Merrie Men, beneath the old trees of Barnsdale Forest, when a young man, who appeared to have come from a distance, presented himself before Robin.

"Noble master," said he, "I bring you good tidings."

"Very good, George," replied the young man. "Let us hear them quickly. What is it all about?"

"It is about a visit of the Bishop of Hereford. His Lordship, accompanied by a score of his servants, will traverse Barnsdale Wood this very day."

"Bravo! This is indeed good tidings. Dost know at what hour my Lord Bishop will give us the honour of his company?"

"About two o'clock, Captain."

"Good. How didst learn of his Lordship's journey?"

"From one of our men, who, in passing through Sheffield, learnt that the Bishop of Hereford proposed paying a visit to St. Mary's Abbey."

"Art a good lad, George, and I thank thee for thy kind thought in putting me on my guard. My sons," added Robin, "pay heed to my words, and we will have a merry jest. Will Scarlett, take with thee a score of men, and go guard the road near thy father's house. Thou, Little John, go with a like number of companions to the path leading to the north of the Forest. Much, thou wilt post thyself at the eastern side of the wood with the rest of the band. I will take up my position on the high-road. We must not give his Lordship an opportunity of escaping, for I am fain to invite him to take part in a right royal feast; he



will be treated nobly, but he must pay for it. As for thee, George, thou wilt choose a deer of good growth and a fine fat roe, and thou wilt prepare two joints to receive the honours of my table."

When his three lieutenants had set out with their little band of men, Robin ordered those who were left to dress themselves as shepherds (the outlaws kept every kind of disguise in their stores), and himself donned a modest smock-frock. This transformation complete, they planted sticks in the ground, to which they suspended the deer, and the flames of a goodly fire, fed with dry branches, soon began to lick the savoury venison.

Towards two o'clock, as George had announced, the Bishop of Hereford and his suite appeared at the end of the road, in the middle of which sat Robin and his men disguised as shepherds.

"The prey approaches," said Robin, with a laugh. "Come, merry friends, baste the meat; here is our guest."

The Bishop, accompanied by his suite, moved quickly, and the noble company soon came up with the shepherds.

At sight of the gigantic spit turning slowly above the fire, the Prelate gave vent to an outburst of violent anger.

"How is this, rogues? what means...?"

Robin Hood raised his eyes to the Bishop, and looked at him stolidly, but made no reply.

"Do ye not hear me, villains?" repeated the Bishop. "I ask for whom do ye prepare this noble feast?"

"For whom?" repeated Robin, with an admirably affected expression of simplicity.

"Yea, for whom? The deer of this Forest belong to the King, and I deem you mighty insolent varlets in daring to lay hands upon it. Answer my question. For whom is this repast prepared?"

"For ourselves, my Lord," replied Robin.

"For you, fool? for you? What a jest! Never think to make me believe that this profusion of food is for your repast."

"My Lord, I speak truth; we be hungry men, and since the roast is cooked to a turn, we will e'en sit down to it."

"To what estate do ye belong? Who are ye?"

"Simple shepherds who guard our flocks. To-day we wished to seek repose

from our labours and to amuse ourselves a little, with which idea we killed the two fine roes you see before you."

"Of a truth, ye wished to amuse yourselves! This is but an artless answer. Come, say, who gave you permission to hunt the King's game?"

"No one."

"No one, varlet! and think ye to calmly enjoy the product of so shameless a theft?"

"Of a surety, my Lord; but an if your Lordship would take your share, we should hold ourselves highly honoured."

"Thine offer is an insult, insolent shepherd; I decline it with scorn. Art not aware that poaching is punishable by death? Peace; enough of these useless words. Prepare to follow me to prison, from whence ye will all be conducted to the gallows."

"The gallows!" cried Robin, with an air of despair.

"Yea, my lad, to the gallows."

"I have no wish to be hanged," groaned Robin Hood, in doleful accents.

"Of that I am very sure, but it matters little; thou and thy companions deserve the noose. Come, fools, prepare to follow me; I have no time to waste."

"Pardon, my Lord, a thousand pardons. We have sinned in ignorance; be merciful to poor wretches who are more deserving of pity than of blame."

"Poor wretches who eat such good roast meat are not to be pitied. Ah, my fine fellows, you feed yourselves on the King's venison; it is well—very well! Together will we go into the presence of His Majesty, and we shall see if he will grant you the pardon which I refuse."

"My Lord," continued Robin, in a supplicating voice, "we have wives and children; be merciful, I implore you, in the name of their weakness and their innocence. What would happen to the poor creatures without our support?"

"What care I for your wives and children?" returned the Bishop, harshly. "Seize the varlets," he added, turning to his followers, "and if they attempt to escape, slay them without pity."

"My Lord," said Robin Hood, "allow me to give you some good advice. Take back your unjust words; they breathe of violence, and are lacking in Christian charity. Believe me, it were wiser for you to accept the offer I have just made you, to partake of our dinner."

"I forbid you to address another

word to me," cried the Bishop, furiously. "Soldiers, seize the robbers!"

"Stand back!" cried Robin, in a voice of thunder, "or, by Our Lady, you will repent it!"

"Have at the vile serfs roundly," repeated the Bishop, "and spare them not."

The Bishop's servants hurled themselves upon the group of Merrie Men, and the *mêlée* threatened to become a bloody one, when Robin wound his horn, and instantly the rest of the band, who, warned of the Bishop's presence, had stolen up quietly, made their appearance.

The first task of the new-comers was to disarm the Bishop's escort.

"My Lord," said Robin to the Prelate, who had fallen dumb with terror on finding into whose hands he had fallen, "you have shown yourself pitiless; we will show no pity neither. What is to be done to the man who would have sent us to the gallows?" asked Robin of his companions.

"His dress must mitigate the severity of his sentence," replied John, quietly; "he must not be made to suffer."

"Your speech is that of an honest man, good Forester."

"Think you so, my Lord?" replied John, quite unconcerned. "Well, I will further disclose to you my peaceful intentions. Instead of torturing you, both body and soul, and killing you by slow degrees, we will simply cut off your head."

"Simply cut off my head!" groaned the Bishop, in a voice of despair.

"Yea," replied Robin; "you must prepare for death, my Lord."

"Robin Hood, have pity on me, I do beseech you!" besought the Bishop, clasping his hands. "Grant me a few hours; I would fain not die without confession."

"Verily, your erstwhile haughtiness hath given place to very great humility, my Lord," responded Robin, coldly; "but this humility doth naught affect me. You are condemned out of your own mouth, therefore prepare your soul to appear before God. Little John," he added, making a sign to his friend, "see to it that the ceremony lacketh naught of due solemnity. Will you follow me, my Lord? I will lead you to the Court of Justice."

Half paralysed with fear, the Bishop dragged himself along, tottering, in the wake of Robin Hood.

When they were arrived at the trysting-tree, Robin made his prisoner sit down on a grassy hillock, and bade one of his men bring some water.

"Will you be pleased, my Lord, to lave your hands and face," asked the young Chief, politely.

Although very much surprised at receiving such a suggestion, the Bishop condescendingly acquiesced. This done, Robin added—

"Will you do me the honour of sharing my repast? I am about to dine, for I cannot administer justice fasting."

"I will dine, if you insist upon it," replied the Bishop, in a tone of resignation.

"I do not insist, my Lord; I pray you."

"Then I yield me to your prayer, Sir Robin."

"Good, my Lord; to dinner, then."

With these words, Robin led his guest to the banqueting hall—that is to say, towards a green sward spangled with flowers, where the meal was already set out.

The festive board, laden with dishes, presented a pleasing spectacle, and its appearance seemed to lighten the Prelate's dismal forebodings. Having fasted since the night before, the Bishop was hungry, and the stimulating odour of the venison mounted to his head.

"These," he said, sitting down, "are admirably cooked viands."

"And of a delicious flavour," added Robin, helping his guest to a choice morsel.

By the middle of the feast the Bishop had forgotten his fears; by the time dessert came, he looked upon Robin only as an amiable companion.

"My excellent friend, he said, "your wine is delicious, it warms my heart. A while ago I was cold, I was ill, sorrowful, anxious; now I feel quite light-hearted."

"I am very happy to hear you say so, my Lord, for you praise my hospitality. My guests are generally enchanted at the good cheer they are welcomed here withal. However, there comes a bad quarter of an hour with them when it comes to the settlement of the account. They are very happy to receive, but they are very loth to give; it really seems quite disagreeable to them."

"True, very true," replied the Prelate, not knowing in the least what he meant by this approval. "Yea, truly, such is



the case. Give me another bumper, an it please you; meseemeth there is a fire in my veins. Ah! mine host, do you know you lead a very happy life here?"

"That is why we are called the Merrie Men of the Forest."

"That is right, that is right. Now, Sir—I do not rightly know your name—allow me to bid you farewell; I must continue my journey."

"Naught could be more reasonable, my Lord. I pray you, pay your reckoning, and prepare to drink the stirrup-cup."

"Pay my reckoning!" grumbled the Bishop. "Am I, then, in an inn? I believed myself to be in Sherwood Forest."

"My Lord, you are in an inn; I am master of the house, and these men around us are my drawers."

"How say you, all these men are your drawers? But there are at least one hundred and fifty or two hundred."

"Yea, my Lord, not counting the absentees. You must see, then, that with such a following I am bound to make my guests pay as heavily as may be."

"Give me my account," said he, "but treat me in a friendly spirit."

"As a great Lord, Sir Guest, as a great Lord," replied Robin, gaily. "Little John!" he called. The latter ran up. "Make out the charges for my Lord the Bishop of Hereford."

The Prelate looked at John, and began to laugh.

"Well indeed, little, little! they call you little, and you might be a young tree! Come, gentle treasurer, give me my score."

"That is scarce needful, my Lord; only tell me where you keep your money, and I will pay myself."

"Insolent varlet!" said the Bishop, "I forbid you to poke your long fingers into my purse."

"I would spare you the trouble of counting, my Lord."

"The trouble of counting! Think you I am drunk? Go seek my valise and bring it me; I will give you a piece of gold."

Little John hastened to obey the Prelate's command; he opened the valise and found a leathern bag. John emptied it; it contained three hundred pieces of gold."

The Bishop of Hereford, with half-closed eyes, heard John's triumphant exclamations without comprehending them, and when Robin said to him—

"My Lord, we thank you for your generosity," he only closed his eyes completely and muttered some confused words, of which Robin caught the following only—

"Saint Mary's Abbey at once . . ."

"He is fain to set forth," said John.

"Order his horse to be brought up," added Robin.

At a sign from John one of the Merrie Men brought up the horse ready saddled and with its head garlanded with flowers.

The Bishop was hoisted half asleep into his saddle, and tied on to prevent a fall, which might prove serious; then, followed by his little company, enlivened by the wine and good cheer, he took the road to St. Mary's.

A band of the Merrie Men, mingling in a friendly way with the Prelate's escort, accompanied the cavalcade to the gates of the Abbey.

It need scarce be added that after ringing the porter's bell the Foresters hasted away as fast as their horses could carry them.

We will not attempt to depict the surprise and horror of the reverend brothers when the Bishop of Hereford appeared before them with a red face, staggering gait, and disordered garments.

On the morrow of this fatal day the Bishop was mad with shame, rage, and humiliation. He passed long hours in prayer, asking God to pardon his faults, and imploring the Divine protection against that rogue and villain Robin Hood.

At the request of the outraged Prelate the Prior of St. Mary's armed fifty men and placed them at the disposal of his guest. Then, his blood boiling with rage, the Bishop led his little army in pursuit of the famous outlaw.

That very day Robin, desiring to see for himself how Sir Richard of the Plain was faring, went alone along a forest path leading to the main road. The sound of an approaching cavalcade attracted his attention; he hastened his steps in the direction of the sound, and found himself face to face with the Bishop of Hereford.

"Robin Hood!" cried the Bishop, recognising our hero. "It is Robin Hood! Traitor, surrender yourself!"

As may be well imagined, Robin Hood had no desire to comply with this request. Surrounded on all sides, unable to defend himself or even to call his Merrie Men to

his aid, he slipped daringly between two horsemen, who made as if to block his passage, and darted with the swiftness of a deer towards a little house standing about a quarter of a mile away.

The Bishop's men started in pursuit of the young man, but, being forced to make a *détour*, they could not reach as soon as he did the house in which he sought shelter.

Robin Hood found the door of the house open, and entering, he barricaded the windows, without paying any heed to the cries of the old woman within seated at her spinning-wheel.

"Have no fear, good mother," said Robin, when he had finished closing the doors and windows; "I am no thief, but a poor unfortunate man, to whom you can render a service."

"What service? What is your name?" demanded the old dame, in very uneasy tones.

"I am an outlaw, good mother; I am Robin Hood. The Bishop of Hereford pursues me to take my life."

"Eh, what? You are Robin Hood?" said the peasant dame, clasping her hands—"the noble and generous Robin Hood! God be praised for enabling a poor creature like myself to pay her debt of gratitude to the charitable outlaw! Look at me, my son, and search the memory of your good deeds for the features of her who speaks with you now. It is two years ago. An ungrateful woman would say you came in here by chance; I say you were sent by Divine Providence. You found me quite alone. I had just lost my husband; there was naught left for me but death. Your sweet and consoling words gave me back courage, strength, and health. The next day a man, sent by your orders, brought me food, clothing, and money. I asked him the name of my generous benefactor, and he answered me, 'He is called Robin Hood.' Since that day, my son, I have always remembered you in my prayers. My house and my life are yours; do as you will with your servant."

"I thank you, good mother," replied Robin Hood, cordially pressing the woman's trembling hands. "I crave your help, not through fear of danger, but to avoid useless shedding of blood. The Bishop is accompanied by fifty men, and, as you see, a struggle between us is impossible—I am but one."

"If your enemies discover your retreat they will kill you," said the old woman.

"Be not uneasy, good mother. They shall not accomplish their end. We will invent a plan for saving ourselves from their violence."

"What plan, my son? Speak; I am ready to obey you."

"Will you exchange your garments for mine?"

"Exchange our garments!" cried the old dame. "I fear, my son, that would be but a useless trick. How could you transform a woman of my age into a gay young gentleman?"

"I will disguise you so well, good mother," replied Robin, "that it will be quite possible to deceive the soldiers, to whom my face is probably unknown. You must feign to be drunk, and my Lord of Hereford will be so anxious to seize my person that he will look only at your dress."

The transformation was quickly effected. Robin put on the old woman's grey gown; then he helped her to dress herself in his hose, tunic, and buskins.

This done, Robin hid the peasant's grey hair under his elegant cap, and attached his weapons to her belt.

The double disguise was just completed when the soldiers arrived at the door of the cottage.

First they knocked repeatedly; then a soldier proposed that he should make his horse kick in the door.

The Prelate received the proposition favourably, whereupon the horseman, turning his horse round, backed it against the door, at the same time pricking it up with his lance. This produced an effect contrary to that expected by the soldier, for the animal reared and threw his rider to the ground.

This accident to the poor soldier, who shot through the air with the rapidity of an arrow, had a disastrous effect. The Bishop, who had come up to see the door fall in and to prevent Robin Hood from escaping, was struck violently in the face by the soldier's spurs.

The pain caused by this blow so exasperated the old man that, without thinking of the unjust cruelty of his rage, he raised the mace which he carried in his hand as a token of his rank, and unmercifully beat the unlucky wretch, who lay half dead under the hoofs of the plunging horse.



In the midst of this valiant proceeding the cottage door opened.

"Close your ranks!" cried the Bishop, in a tone of command; "close your ranks!"

The soldiers pressed in confusion around the cottage.

The Bishop dismounted, but as he touched the ground, he stumbled over the body of the soldier, where it lay weltering in blood, and fell head foremost through the open doorway.

The confusion caused by this ludicrous accident served Robin Hood's turn admirably. Stunned and breathless, the Bishop saw, without examining closely, a figure standing motionless in the darkest corner of the room.

"Seize the rogue!" cried his Lordship, pointing out the old woman to his soldiers. "Gag him, bind him to a horse. You are answerable for his safe keeping with your lives, for if ye let him escape, ye shall all hang without mercy."

The soldiers rushed upon the person indicated by their leader's furious outcry, and in default of a gag they muffled up the old woman's face in a large handkerchief which happened to be handy.

Bold to rashness, Robin Hood in a trembling voice implored mercy for the prisoner; but the Bishop thrust him aside and left the cottage, after enjoying the intense satisfaction of seeing his enemy bound hand and foot on the back of a horse.

Sick and half blinded by the wound which had gashed his face, his Lordship remounted and ordered his men to follow him to the Trysting Tree of the outlaws. It was upon the highest branch of this that the Bishop proposed to hang Robin. The worthy man was determined to give the outlaws a terrible warning of the fate in store for them, if they continued to follow their worthless leader's mode of life.

No sooner had the cavalcade disappeared into the depths of the wood, than Robin Hood left the cottage and ran towards the Trysting Tree.

He had just entered a glade when he perceived Little John, Will Scarlett, and Much at some little distance.

"See there in the centre of the clearing," said Little John to his two friends, "what a strange creature approaches; it looks like an old witch. By'r Lady, if I thought the vixen had evil intentions, I would let fly an arrow at her."

"Thine arrow could not touch her," replied Will, laughing.

"And wherefore, I pray thee? Dost doubt my skill?"

"Not the least in the world; but an if, as thou dost suppose, this woman is a witch, she could arrest the flight of thine arrow."

"By my faith!" quoth Much, who had kept his attention fixed on the strange figure, "I share Little John's opinion. This doth seem a very extraordinary old dame; her figure is gigantic, and, moreover, she doth not walk like a woman, she covers the ground with prodigious strides. Verily she affrighteth me; and if you will suffer it, Will, we will e'en prove the power of the sorcery she seems so richly endowed withal."

"Act not so rashly, Much," replied Will. "The garments this poor creature wears claim our respect; and for me, you know I could not hurt a woman. Beside, who knows whether this strange creature be verily a witch? One must not judge by appearances, for oftentimes it happens that an ugly rind doth enclose an excellent fruit. In spite of her ridiculous looks, the poor old dame is, mayhap, a good wench and an honest Christian. Be kind to her, and, to make the indulgence easier, call to mind Robin's orders, which do straitly forbid any hostile or even disrespectful doings toward women."

Little John made as if to bend his bow and take aim at the supposed witch.

"Hold!" cried a deep and sonorous voice.

The three men uttered a cry of surprise.

"I am Robin Hood," added the person who had puzzled the Foresters so sorely, and while declaring his name, Robin tore off the head-dress which covered his head and part of his face. "I was quite unrecognisable, then?" asked our hero, as he joined his comrades.

"You are very ugly, my good friend," replied Will.

"Why did you assume such an unbecoming disguise?" asked Much.

Robin related to his friends as briefly as possible the mishap which had befallen him.

"Now," he continued, having ended his tale, "we must think about defending ourselves. First of all, I must have clothes. You, good Much, will do me the service of hastening to the store-house and bringing me thence some suitable

garments. Meanwhile, Will and Little John will assemble all the men who are in the Forest round about the Trysting Tree. Hasten, my lads; I promise you compensation for all the trouble caused us by my Lord Bishop of Hereford."

Little John and Will dashed off into the Forest in different directions, while Much went in search of the garments required by Robin.

An hour later Robin, arrayed in an elegant hunting-suit, arrived at the Trysting Tree.

John brought sixty men, and Will had collected forty.

Robin dispersed his men among the thickets which formed an impenetrable background to the clearing, and seated himself at the foot of the great tree designed by his Lordship to serve as a gallows.

Scarce were these arrangements completed, ere the ground echoed with the sound of the approaching cavalcade, and the Bishop arrived, followed by his escort.

When the soldiers had made their way to the middle of the clearing, the blast of a horn rang through the air, the foliage of the young trees stirred, and from every side emerged men armed to the teeth.

A cold shudder ran through the Bishop at sight of the Foresters' formidable appearance. The latter ranged themselves in battle array at a sign from their Chief, who had not yet been perceived by the Prelate; he threw a glance of dismay around him, and discovered a young man clad in a scarlet tunic, with words of command on his lips, directing the band of outlaws.

"Who is this man?" demanded the Bishop of a soldier standing beside the prisoner, who was bound to a horse.

"That man is Robin Hood," replied the prisoner, in trembling tones.

"Robin Hood!" quoth the Bishop. "And who, then, art thou, wretch?"

"I am but a woman, my Lord—a poor old woman."

"Woe be to thee, malignant hag!" cried the infuriated Bishop, "woe be to thee! Come, my men," continued his Lordship, beckoning to his men, "charge down the glade. Fear nothing; force a road with your swords through the ranks of these rogues. Forward, my brave lads, forward!"

Doubtless the brave lads thought that

if the order to attack the bandits was easy enough to give, it was more difficult to carry out, for they did not stir.

At a signal from Robin, the Foresters adjusted their arrows, lifting their bows with admirable uniformity; and their reputation for skill was so widely known and so renowned that the Bishop's soldiers, unable to remain inactive, stooped in their saddles as one man.

"Down with your arms!" cried Robin Hood. "Unbind the prisoner."

The soldiers obeyed the young man's orders.

"My good mother," said Robin, leading the old woman beyond the glade, "go home now, and to-morrow I will send you a reward for your kind action. Go quick. I have no time to thank you now, but forget not that my gratitude is great."

The old dame kissed Robin Hood's hands, and went her way, accompanied by a guide.

"O Lord, have pity on me!" cried the Bishop, wringing his hands.

Robin Hood drew nearer to his enemy.

"Welcome, my Lord," said he, in a wheedling tone, "and permit me to thank you for your visit. My hospitality, I see, proved so attractive that you could not resist the desire of once more partaking its delights."

The Bishop gazed despairingly at Robin, and a deep sigh escaped him.

"You appear downcast, my Lord," Robin continued. "What troubles you? Are not you pleased to meet with me again?"

"I cannot well say that I am pleased," replied the Bishop, "for, indeed, the plight in which I find myself renders that impossible. You can readily guess my intention in coming here, and your conscience will acquit you if you avenge yourself on me, for you will be striking an enemy. However, let me say this much. Let me go free, and never, under any circumstances whatever, will I seek to harm you. Let me go with my men, and your soul will not have to answer to God for a mortal sin, for such it would surely be, were you to attempt the life of a high priest of the Holy Church."

"I detest murder and violence, my Lord," replied Robin Hood, "as mine actions do daily prove. I never attack; I am content to defend my life and the lives of my brave followers, who trust in me. Did I cherish in my heart the least



sentiment of hate or rancour toward you, my Lord, I would inflict on you the same death which you had intended for me. But it is not so. I bear you no ill will, and I take no vengeance on those who have not succeeded in harming me. Therefore I will set you free, but on one condition only."

"Speak, Sir," said the Bishop, graciously.

"You must promise to respect my independence and the liberty of my men; you must swear that at no future period and under no circumstances whatever will you lend a hand to any attempt upon my life."

"I have willingly promised to do you no harm," replied the Bishop, suavely.

"A promise is not binding on an unscrupulous conscience, my Lord. I must have an oath."

"I swear by St. Paul to let you live as you please."

"Very good, my Lord; you are free."

"I thank you a thousand times, Robin Hood. Will you be so good as to give an order to my men to assemble; they have dispersed, and are fraternising with your companions."

"I will do as you wish, my Lord; in a few minutes the men will be in the saddle. In the mean time will you accept some slight refreshment?"

"Nay, nay! I wish for naught," the Bishop answered hastily, terrified at the mere mention of the word.

"You have been long fasting, my Lord, and a slice of pasty . . ."

"Not a morsel, good host—not a mouthful even."

"A cup of good wine, then?"

"Nay, nay, a hundred times nay!"

"You will neither eat nor drink with me, my Lord?"

"I am neither hungry nor thirsty. I wish to depart, that is all. Do not seek to detain me longer, I pray you."

"As you please, my Lord. Little John," added Robin, "his Reverence wishes to leave us."

"His Reverence is at perfect liberty," growled John. "I will give him his bill."

"My bill!" repeated the Bishop, in surprise. "What do you mean? I have neither eaten nor drunken."

"Oh! that boots not," replied Little John, calmly; "from the moment you enter the hostelry, you must share its

expenses. Your men are hungry; they ask for food. Your horses are satisfied already; nor must we be the sufferers by your abstemiousness, and receive naught, because it doth not please you to accept of anything. We demand largess for the servants who have had the trouble of entertaining man and beast."

"Take what you will," answered the Bishop, impatiently, "and let me go."

"Is the money still in the same place?" asked Little John.

"It is here," replied the Bishop, showing a little leathern bag attached to his saddle-bow.

"It feels heavier than at your last visit, my Lord."

"I should well think so," responded the Bishop, making a desperate effort to appear cool and calm; "it contains a much larger sum."

"You shall watch me take it away, my Lord; and may I ask how much there is in this elegant saddle-bag?"

"Five hundred pieces of gold . . ."

"Admirable! What generosity to come here with such a treasure!" said the young man, ironically.

"This treasure," stammered the Bishop—"shall we not divide it? You dare not utterly despoil me—rob me of so large a sum?"

"Rob you!" repeated Little John, disdainfully. "What do you mean by such a word? Do you not comprehend the difference between robbing and taking from a man what is not his? You have obtained this money on false pretences; you took it from those who needed it, and I shall return it to them. Thus you see, my Lord, I do not rob you."

"We call our way the woodland philosophy," said Robin, with a laugh.

"The legality of such philosophy is doubtful," returned the Bishop; "but having no means of defence, I must submit to anything you may exact. Therefore, take my purse."

"I have another request to make, my Lord," Little John continued.

"What is it?" questioned the Bishop, anxiously.

"Our spiritual adviser," replied Little John, "is not at Barnsdale just now, and as it is long since we have profited by his pious instructions, we would beg of you, my Lord, to say a Mass for us."

"What profane request is this you dare

make to me?" cried the Bishop. "I would liever die than do aught so impious."

"Nevertheless, it is your duty, my Lord," replied Robin, "to help us at all times to adore the Lord. Little John is right; for long weeks we have not been able to take part in the Holy Office of the Mass, and we would not lose this fortunate opportunity; I pray you, therefore, be so kind as to prepare yourself to satisfy our very proper demands."

"It would be a mortal sin, a crime, and I should expect to be struck by the hand of God, did I commit this unworthy sacrilege!" replied the Bishop, purple with rage.

"My Lord," continued Robin, gravely, "we reverence with the most Christian humility the divine symbols of the Catholic faith, and, believe me, you will never find, even within the walls of your vast Cathedral, a more attentive or more select congregation than the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest."

"Can I put any faith in your words?" asked the Bishop, doubtfully.

"Yea, my Lord, and you will soon recognise the truth of them."

"Then I will believe you. Conduct me to the Chapel."

"This way, my Lord."

Robin, followed by the Bishop, made for an enclosure at a short distance from the Trysting Tree. There, in the centre of a declivity appeared an altar of earth embellished with a thick layer of moss sprinkled with flowers. All the vessels necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice were disposed on the high altar with exquisite taste, and His Reverence marvelled at the beauty of this natural shrine.

It was a touching spectacle to see the band of 150 or 200 men kneeling in prayer with bared heads.

After Mass the Merrie Men testified their gratitude to the Bishop, and he had been so astonished at their respectful attitude during the celebration of the Holy Office that he could not resist putting a host of questions to Robin as to his manner of life beneath the trees of the old Forest.

Whilst Robin responded with a charming courtesy to the Bishop's questions, the foresters placed before the soldiers a substantial repast, and Much looked after the preparation of the most delicate feast

that had ever been served in the green-wood.

Led insensibly toward the merry revelers by Robin, the Bishop watched them with an envious eye, and the sight of their gaiety dissipated the last vestiges of his bad temper.

"Your men employ their time well," said Robin, pointing out the most voracious group amongst them.

"They certainly eat with a good appetite."

"They must be hungry, my Lord; it is two o'clock, and I myself feel the need of something. Will you play your part in a little unceremonious dinner?"

"Thank you, my dear host," replied the Bishop, trying to remain deaf to the repeated appeals of his stomach; "I wish for nothing, absolutely nothing, although I *am* a little hungry."

"You should never disregard the calls of nature, my Lord," replied Robin, gravely. "Mind and body alike suffer thereby, and the health is injured. Come, let us take our places on this green turf; they will bring us something, and you need only eat a little bread, and if you be afraid of retarding your departure."

"Am I obliged to obey you?" said the Bishop, with a vainly dissimulated expression of joy.

"You are not constrained, my Lord," said Robin, maliciously, "and if you are not pleased to taste of this delicious venison pasty or the exquisite wine contained in this bottle, abstain, I pray you; for it is even more dangerous to force the stomach to receive food than to deprive it of all nourishment for several hours."

"Oh, I do not force my stomach," replied the Bishop, laughing. "I am endowed with an excellent appetite, and as I have been long fasting, why, I think I will e'en accept your kind invitation."

"To table, then, my Lord, and a good appetite!"

The Bishop of Hereford dined well. He was fond of the bottle, and the wine Robin Hood poured out for him was so heady that at the end of the repast the Bishop was quite drunk, and towards evening he returned to St. Mary's Abbey in a condition of mind and body which drew forth fresh cries of horror and indignation from the pious Monks of that Monastery.



## CHAPTER VI

"I SHOULD much like to know how the Bishop of Hereford finds himself to-day," said Will Scarlett to his cousin Little John, who, followed by Much, was accompanying Will to Barnsdale.

"The poor Prelate's head must be a little heavy," replied Much, "though one would think that his Lordship was accustomed to the abuse of wine."

"Your observation is very just, my friend," replied John; "my Lord of Hereford doth possess the faculty of drinking heavily without losing his senses."

"Robin treated him right pleasantly," said Much. "Does he act thus toward every Ecclesiastic he encounters?"

"Yea, when these same Ecclesiastics, like the Bishop of Hereford, do abuse their spiritual and temporal power to rob the Saxon people; it hath even happened to Robin not only to await the arrival of these pious travellers, but eke to go out of his own way to put himself in theirs."

"What do you mean by 'go out of his way'?" said Much.

"I will tell you a story as we go along which will explain my words. One morning Robin Hood learned that two Black Friars, carrying a large sum of money to their Abbey, would traverse a part of Sherwood Forest. This was good news for Robin, as our funds were on the decline, and the arrival of the money would be most opportune. Without a word to any one (the waylaying of two Monks was but a small affair), Robin, dressed in a long pilgrim's robe, posted himself in the road the two Friars must take. He had not long to wait, for the Monks soon appeared, two large men sitting squarely in their saddles.

"Robin advanced to meet them, bowed to the ground, and, seizing as he rose the bridles of the two horses, which were pacing side by side, said in pitiable accents, 'Bless you, holy brethren, and let me tell you how glad I am to have met you; 'tis a great happiness for me, and one for which I humbly give thanks to Heaven.'

"What means this deluge of words?" asked one of the Monks.

"It expresseth my joy, Father. You are the representatives of the God of goodness, you are the reflection of Divine mercy. I need help, I am unhappy, I am

hungry; brothers, I die of hunger, give me the charity of some food.'

"We have no provisions with us," replied the Monk who had first spoken, 'therefore cease your useless demands, and let us pursue our way in peace.'

"Robin Hood, who still held the bridles of the horses in his hands, prevented the Monks from escaping him.

"Brothers," he went on in a still sadder and weaker voice, 'have pity on my misery, and as you have no bread to give me, give me instead a small piece of money. I have wandered in this wood since yesterday morning, and have neither eaten nor drunk. Good brothers, in the name of the Holy Mother of Christ, give me, I conjure you, this small charity.'

"See here, foolish babbler, let go of our bridles; leave us in peace; we do not wish to waste our time with a witless loon like you.'

"Yea," added the second Monk, repeating word for word the speech of his companion, 'we do not wish to waste our time with a witless loon like you.'

"For mercy's sake, good Monks, a few pence to keep me from dying of hunger.'

"Even supposing that I were fain to give you an alms, thick-headed mendicant, 'twould be impossible, for we do not possess a farthing.'

"All the same, brothers, you have not the appearance of men deprived of all resources; you are well mounted, well equipped, and your jovial faces shine with good cheer."

"We had some money a few hours ago, but we have been despoiled by robbers.'

"They have not left us a penny piece," added the Monk, whose mission seemed to be to repeat the words of his superior like an echo.

"I verily believe," said Robin, 'that ye both lie with a rare impudence.'

"Thou dost dare to accuse us of falsehood, thou miserable rogue?" cried the fat Monk.

"Yea, first because ye have not been robbed, for there are no robbers in the old Forest of Sherwood; and then ye tried to deceive me in saying that ye had no money. I hate falsehood, and I love to know the truth. So you will see it is but natural I should assure myself by mine own investigations of the falseness of your words.'

"As he finished speaking, Robin let fall the bridles of the horses and put his hand on a bag which hung from the first Monk's saddle-bow, who, startled, put spurs to his horse and made off at a gallop, closely followed by his companion. Robin, who, as you know, is fleet as a deer, overtook the travellers, and at a stroke unhorsed them both.

"Spare us, worthy mendicant,' murmured the fat Monk; 'have pity on your brethren. I assure you we have neither money nor food to offer you, wherefore it is a sheer impossibility to exact immediate help from us.'

"We have naught, worthy mendicant,' added the Father Superior's echo—a poor lean devil, now livid with fear. 'We cannot give you what we have not ourselves!'

"Well, Fathers,' Robin continued, 'I would fain put faith in the sincerity of your words. Therefore will I point out to you both a means of obtaining a little money. We will all three kneel down and ask the Holy Virgin to help us. Our Lady hath never abandoned me in the time of my need, and I am sure she will hearken favourably to my supplications. I was engaged in prayer when ye appeared at the end of the road, and, thinking that Heaven had sent you to my assistance, I put my modest request to you. Your refusal hath not discouraged me. Ye are not the emissaries of Providence, that is all; but ye are—or should be—holy men: we will pray, and our united voices will the better carry our invocations to the feet of the Lord.'

"The two Monks refused to kneel, and Robin Hood could only constrain them to do so by threatening to search their pockets."

"What," interrupted Will Scarlett, "they all three fell on their knees to ask Heaven to send them money?"

"Yea," replied the story-teller, "and they prayed, by Robin's orders, aloud and in an audible voice."

"It must have made a funny picture," said Will.

"Very funny indeed. Robin had enough self-control to remain serious, and listened gravely to the Monks' prayers. 'Holy Virgin,' said they, 'send us some money to save us from harm.' It is unnecessary to tell you that the money came not. The Monk's voices took every minute sadder and more lamentable accents, so

that at length Robin could control himself no longer, but broke into a hearty peal of laughter.

"The Monks, reassured by this transport of mirth, attempted to rise, but Robin raised his staff and asked, 'Have ye received any money?'

"No,' they replied, 'none.'

"Then pray once more.'

"The Monks bore this wearisome torture for an hour; then they began to wring their hands in despair, to tear their hair and weep with rage. They were spent with fatigue and humiliation, but they still protested that they possessed nothing.

"The Holy Virgin hath never abandoned me,' quoth Robin, to console them. 'I have not the proofs of her goodness as yet, but I shall not have much longer to await them. Therefore, my friends, be not disheartened, but, on the contrary, pray the more fervently.'

"The two Monks groaned so dismally that at length Robin got tired of listening to them.

"Now, my dear brothers,' he said to them, 'let us see how much money Heaven hath sent us.'

"Not a farthing,' cried the fat Friar.

"Not a farthing?' repeated Robin. 'How is that? My good brothers, tell me, could ye be quite sure I had no money, even though I did affirm the emptiness of my pockets?'

"No, certainly we could not be quite sure,' said one of the Monks.

"There is always a means of ascertaining.'

"What is that?' asked the fat Monk.

"It is quite simple,' replied Robin; 'you would have to search me. But it doth not concern you greatly whether I have money or no, that question interesting myself alone. Now I am e'en going to take the liberty of searching your pockets.'

"We cannot submit to such an outrage,' cried both Monks with one voice.

"It is not an outrage, my brothers; I only wish to prove to you that if Heaven hath heard my prayers, it hath sent me succour through your holy hands.'

"We have nothing, nothing!'

"It is of that I wish to assure myself. Whatever sum of money hath fallen to you jointly, we will divide, one part for you and the other for myself. Search



yourselves, I pray you, and tell me what you possess.'

"The Monks obeyed mechanically; each put a hand into his pocket, but brought nothing whatever out.

"I see,' said Robin Hood, 'that you would fain give me the pleasure of searching you myself; so be it, then.'

"The Monks objected strenuously, but Robin Hood, armed with his terrible staff, threatened so seriously to beat them unmercifully that they resigned themselves to a close search. After seeking for some minutes, Robin got together 500 golden crowns. In despair at the loss of all this pelf, the fat Monk asked Robin, anxiously, 'Will you not share the money with us?'

"Do you really think it was sent you by Heaven since we have been together?' replied Robin, looking at the Monk sternly. The Monks were silent. 'You have lied; you protested that you had no money when you carried in your pockets the ransom of a good man; you refused an alms to one who said that he was famished and dying. Do you think, either of you, this was the conduct of a Christian? However, I pardon you. I will keep the promise I made you; here are fifty gold crowns for each of you. Go, and if upon your way ye should meet with a poor beggar, remember that Robin Hood hath left you the means of helping him.'

"At the name of Robin Hood the Monks trembled, and gazed stupidly at our friend. Without taking any notice of their affrighted looks, Robin saluted them and disappeared into the glade. Hardly had the sound of his footsteps died away, ere the Monks threw themselves upon their horses and fled without a glance behind."

"Robin must have been very skilfully disguised not to have been recognised by the Monks," said Much.

"Robin Hood is wonderfully clever at that, as you have seen for yourself in the way he counterfeited the old woman. I could cite hundreds of examples in which he was disguised and not recognised, and I assure you it was a merry jest he played upon the Town-Reeve of Nottingham."

"Yea," said Much, "it was a pretty jest, and it made a noise; every one laughed at the Reeve and applauded Robin's audacity."

"What was that?" asked William. "I have never heard of it."

"What, know you not of Robin's adventure as a butcher?"

"Nay; but tell me the tale, Little John."

"Willingly. About four years ago a great dearth of meat was felt in Nottinghamshire. The butchers kept the price of meat so high that only the rich could furnish their tables withal. Robin Hood, who is alway on the look-out for news, learned of this state of things, and resolved to find a remedy for the sufferings of the poor. One market day he lay in wait upon the road through the Forest to be taken by a cattle-dealer, who was the chief purveyor to the town of Nottingham. Robin met his man mounted upon a thoroughbred and driving before him an immense herd of cattle, and he at once bought the herd, the mare, the butcher's consent and his secrecy, and as a guarantee of the last purchase, he confided the man to our care until his own return to the Forest.

"Robin, who intended to sell his meat at a very low price, thought that if he neglected to procure protection—for instance, that of the Reeve—the butchers might combine against him, and defeat his good intentions toward the poor. The Reeve kept a large Inn, where the dealers of the neighbourhood met together when they came to Nottingham. Robin knew this, and to prevent any strife betwixt himself and the other dealers, he took his beasts to the Market Place, picked out the fattest animal, and led it to the Town Reeve's Inn.

"The latter was standing at his door, and was much struck by the appearance of the young bullock Robin was leading. Our friend, delighted at the great man's welcome—which was, perhaps, somewhat interested—told him he possessed the finest drove in the Market, and that he would be well pleased an if the Reeve would accept a bullock as a present.

"The Reeve protested modestly against so rich a gift.

"Sir Reeve,' continued Robin, 'I am ignorant of the customs of this country. I do not know my fellow dealers, and I greatly fear me they may seek to fasten a quarrel upon me. I should therefore be obliged if you would extend your protection to one who is only too anxious to please you.'

"The Reeve swore (for the moment his gratitude equalled the bullock in size)

that he would hang any man who should dare to molest our friend; and he declared further that Robin was a good fellow, and the best butcher who had ever sold him meat.

"With mind at rest on this important point, Robin returned to the Market Place, and when the sales began, a crowd of poor people came to ask the price of the meat; but, unhappily for their small purses, the price was still very high. When he saw the prices fixed, Robin offered as much meat for a penny as his neighbours were selling for three.

"The news of this extraordinary cheapness spread rapidly through the town, and the poor flocked in from all sides. Robin then gave them for a penny about as much as his neighbours could give for five. Soon it was known in every corner of the Market that Robin sold only to the poor. Thus they formed an excellent opinion of him, while his fellow-dealers, who were not disposed to follow his example, looked upon him as a prodigal who, in an access of generosity, was squandering the best part of his wealth; so acting on this supposition, they sent to Robin all those to whom they could sell nothing.

"Towards mid-day the cattle-dealers consulted together, and with one accord decided that they must make the acquaintance of the new-comer. One of them, detaching himself from the rest, approached Robin, and said—

"Good friend and brother, your conduct seems passing strange; for, by your leave, it quite ruins the trade. But, on the other hand, as your intentions are excellent, we can only congratulate you heartily, and give warm praise to so admirable a sentiment of generosity. My companions, enraptured with your goodness of heart, charge me to present their compliments and to invite you to dinner in their names."

"I accept their invitation with the greatest pleasure," replied Robin, gaily, "and I am ready to follow wherever you are pleased to lead me."

"We usually meet at the Town Reeve's Inn," answered the butcher, "and if that house is not out of your way . . ."

"Why, certainly not," interrupted Robin. "On the contrary, I shall be most happy to be in the company of a man whom you honour with your confidence."

"In that case, Master, we will end the day right merrily."

"Were you with Robin then?" asked Much, surprised to hear the narrator enter into so much detail.

"Of course. Do you think I could have allowed Robin to expose himself alone to the danger of being recognised? He had ordered me to keep aloof; but I did not consider myself bound to obey his order, and I was almost at his side. All at once he became aware of my presence, and, seizing my hand, he angrily reproached me for my disobedience. In a low voice I explained my motive for disregarding his orders. He calmed down at once, and regarding me with that sweet smile you know so well, he said—

"Mingle with the crowd, John, and while keeping an eye on me, look to thine own safety also." I obeyed him, and disappeared in the crowd. When Robin and the gay band of butchers set out for the Reeve's Inn, I followed in their wake, and entered the dining-hall along with him.

"Ordering a good meal, I took my place in the embrasure of a window.

"Robin was very merry that day, and toward the end of dinner he invited them to drink of the best wine in the cellar, adding that he would bear this last expense. As you may imagine, Robin's generous offer was received with acclamation; the wine went round the room, and I had my share with the rest.

"When the merriment was at its height, the Reeve appeared in the doorway.

"Robin invited him to take a seat. He accepted, and as Robin seemed to be the guest of honour, he asked him for news of Robin Hood.

"'Tis a cunning rascal!" cried one of the butchers; 'a fine blade, a rare wit, and a good lad.'

"Then the Reeve perceived me. I was not drunk, and my sober face inspired him with a desire to question me.

"That young man," said he, indicating Robin by a glance, 'is doubtless a prodigal who, having sold lands, house, or castle, intends to squander his money foolishly.'

"It may well be so," I replied with indifference.

"Maybe he doth still possess some wealth," continued the Reeve.

"That is very likely, Master."

"Do you think he would be disposed to sell his remaining cattle cheap?"



“‘I do not know; but there is one very simple way of finding out.’

“‘What is that?’ asked the Reeve, innocently.

“‘Why, to ask him thyself.’

“‘You are right, Sir Stranger.’ Saying which the Reeve approached Robin, and, after paying him some pompous compliments on his generosity, he congratulated him on the noble use to which he was putting his fortune. ‘My young friend,’ added the Reeve, ‘have you not some cattle to sell? I will find you a purchaser, and, while rendering you this service, permit me to remark that a man of your rank and appearance cannot well become a cattle-dealer without compromising his dignity.’

“Robin perfectly understood the true motive of this crafty speech; he began to laugh, and answered the obliging Reeve that he possessed a thousand head of cattle, and that he would dispose of them willingly for five hundred golden crowns.

“‘I will offer you three hundred,’ said the Reeve.

“‘At present prices,’ Robin continued, ‘my beasts are worth, taking one with another, two crowns a head.’

“‘If you will consent to sell the whole herd, I will give you three hundred crowns; and I might remark, my gallant gentleman, that three hundred gold crowns in your purse would be worth more than one thousand beasts in your pastures. Come, decide; the bargain will be for three hundred gold crowns.’

“‘‘Tis too little,’ replied Robin, throwing a furtive look at me.

“‘A liberal heart like yours, my Lord,’ replied the Reeve, trying to flatter, ‘should not haggle over a few crowns. Come, let us strike a bargain. Where are your cattle? I should like to see them all together.’

“‘All together!’ repeated Robin, laughing at an idea which struck him.

“‘Certainly, my young friend; and if the pasture of this magnificent herd is not very far from here, we could ride over and conclude the bargain there. I will take the money, and if you are reasonable, the matter can be settled before we return to Nottingham.’

“‘I possess a few acres about a mile from the town,’ replied Robin; ‘my beasts are penned there, and there you may see them at your ease.’

“‘A mile from Nottingham!’ replied

the Reeve—‘some acres. . . . I know the neighbourhood, and I cannot quite make out the situation of your property.’

“‘Silence!’ whispered Robin, leaning toward the Reeve. ‘I desire for private reasons to conceal my name and quality. A word of explanation as to the whereabouts of my cattle would betray a secret required in mine own interest. You take me, do you not?’

“‘Perfectly, my young friend,’ replied the Reeve, winking slyly; ‘friends are to be feared, the family dreaded. I understand, I understand.’

“‘You possess an admirable penetration of mind,’ said Robin, mysteriously, ‘and I am tempted to believe that we understand each other wonderfully. Well, an if you like, we will profit by the inattention of the butchers, and make off secretly. Are you ready to follow me?’

“‘How now! ’tis I who wait for you. I will have our horses saddled with all haste.’

“‘Go, then; I will rejoin you immediately.’

“The Reeve left the room, and at Robin’s orders I went to seek our companions, whom I had posted, in case of misadventure, within sound of his horn, and announced the Town Reeve’s visit to them.

“A few minutes after my departure the latter took Robin up to his private lodging, presented him to his wife, a pretty woman of some twenty years, and begging him to take a seat, said he would go and count his money.

“When the Reeve returned to the room in which he had left Robin alone with his wife, he found the young man at the feet of the lady.

“This sight greatly irritated the touchy husband, but his hope of gulling Robin enabled him to control his anger. He only bit his lips, and said, ‘I am ready to follow you, fair Sir.’

“Robin threw a kiss to the pretty lady, and, to the great indignation of the scandalised husband, announced to her his speedy return.

“Soon after, the Reeve and Robin set out on horseback from Nottingham.

“Robin led his companion by the most deserted woodland paths to the cross-road where we were to meet him.

“‘This,’ said Robin, pointing to a delightful valley, ‘is part of my land.’

“‘You speak absurdly and falsely,’

replied the Reeve, who thought it was all a hoax. 'This Forest, with all it contains, is the property of the King.'

"Possibly,' returned Robin; 'but as I have taken possession of it, it belongs to me.'

"To you?'

"Certainly, and you shall soon learn in what manner.'

"We are in a lonely and dangerous part,' said the Reeve. 'The wood is infested by robbers. God keep us from falling into the hands of that wretch, Robin Hood! Should such a misfortune befall us, we should very soon be stripped of all we possess.'

"We shall see what he will do,' replied Robin, with a laugh, 'for I could wager a thousand to one that we shall be face to face with him immediately.'

"The Reeve turned pale, and cast affrighted glances into the underwood.

"I wish,' said he, 'that your estates were less evilly situated; and had you warned me of the dangers surrounding them, I would certainly never have come.'

"I assure you, my dear sir,' replied Robin, 'that we are on my land.'

"What mean you? Of what land do you speak?' asked the other, anxiously.

"My words seem plain enow to me,' replied Robin. 'I show you these glades, valleys, cross-roads, and I say, "Behold my estates." When you speak of your wife, do you not say "my wife"?''

"Yea, yea, without doubt,' stammered the Reeve. 'And I pray you, what is your name? I am anxious to know the name of so rich a landlord.'

"Your very proper curiosity shall soon be gratified,' laughed Robin Hood.

"At that moment a large herd of deer crossed the road.

"Look, look, Master, to your right; there are an hundred beasts. How say you, are they not fat and well to look upon?'

"The poor Reeve trembled in all his limbs.

"I would I had never come here,' said he, gazing into the depths of the wood with terror.

"Why?' asked Robin. 'I assure you old Sherwood is a charming dwelling-place; besides, what have you to fear? Am I not with you?'

"That is just what doth alarm me, Sir Stranger. For some moments past I own

that your companionship hath ceased to be agreeable to me.'

"Happily for me, there are very few people of that opinion, Sir Reeve,' replied Robin, laughing; 'but since, to my distress, you are of that number, it is useless to prolong our interview.'

"As he said this, Robin bowed ironically to his companion, and raised his hunting-horn to his lips.

"(I forgot to tell you, my friends, that we had followed the travellers step by step.) At his first call we ran forward. The terrified Reeve very near fell flat upon the neck of his horse.

"What do you desire, noble Master?' said I to Robin. 'Give me your orders, I beg, that I may execute them instantly.'

"Do you always speak thus to Robin, Little John?" asked Will Scarlett.

"Yea, Will, for it is a duty and a pleasure," replied the young giant, good-humouredly.

"I have brought hither the puissant Town Reeve of Nottingham,' replied Robin. 'His Lordship wishes to see my cattle and share my supper. See to it, my good lieutenant, that our guest is treated with the style and splendour due to his position.'

"He shall be served with the choicest viands,' I replied, 'for I know he will pay very generously for his dinner.'

"Pay!' cried the Reeve. 'What mean you by that?'

"Explanations will follow in their turn, Master,' replied Robin. 'And now permit me to answer the question you did me the honour to put as we entered the Forest.'

"What question?' muttered the Reeve.

"You asked my name.'

"Alack!' groaned the Inn-keeper.

"They call me Robin Hood, Master.'

"So I see,' said the Reeve, looking round at the Merrie Men.

"As to what we mean by paying, it is this. We keep open house for the poor, but we re-imburse ourselves largely by the guests who are fortunate enow to possess well-furnished purses.'

"What are your conditions?' asked the Reeve, in a doleful voice.

"We have none, nor any fixed price; we take the whole of our guests' money without counting it. For example, you have three hundred gold crowns in your pocket.'



" 'Lord, Lord !' muttered the Reeve.

" 'Your expenses will be three hundred gold crowns.'

" 'Three hundred crowns !'

" 'Yea, and I advise you to eat as much as possible and drink as much as you can, so as not to have to pay for what you have not consumed.'

" An excellent repast was served upon the green turf. The Reeve was not hungry, and ate but little, though, to make up for it, he drank heartily. This boundless thirst we supposed to be a result of his despair.

" He gave us three hundred golden crowns, and no sooner was the last crown in my purse than he manifested an ardent desire to quit our company. Robin ordered his horse to be brought, helped him into the saddle, wished him good luck, and begged earnestly to be remembered to his charming wife.

" The Reeve made no reply to our farewells ; he was in such haste to leave the Forest that he put his horse to a gallop, and set off without saying one word. Thus ended Robin's adventure with the Town Reeve of Nottingham."

" I should much like," said Will Scarlett, " to prove my cleverness in disguising myself one day. Have you ever tried it, Little John ? "

" Yea, once, in obedience to Robin's orders."

" And how did you fare ? " asked Will.

" Well enough for the occasion," replied John.

" And what was the occasion ? " asked Much.

" 'Twas thus. One morning Robin Hood wished to pay a visit to Halbert Lindsay and his pretty little wife ; but I pointed out to him the danger of going openly into the town after what had happened with the Reeve about the sale of the cattle, for we feared serious reprisals. Robin Hood laughed at my fears, and replied that, in order to deceive everybody, he would go disguised as a Norman. To that intent he assumed a magnificent knight's dress, paid a visit to Halbert, and from his abode made his way to the Town Reeve's Inn. There he spent much money, complimented the host's pretty wife upon her good looks, and chatted with the Reeve, who overwhelmed him with attentions. Then, a few minutes before quitting the house, he took the man aside, and said to him with a laugh,

' A thousand thanks, good host, for your courteous entertainment of Robin Hood.'

" Before the Reeve could recover from the astonishment caused by Robin's words, the latter had vanished."

" Good," said William ; " but this fresh proof of Robin's ability doth not tell us in what manner you were disguised, Little John."

" I dressed myself as a beggar."

" But wherefore ? "

" To carry out, as I told you, an order from Robin. Robin wished to put my ability to the test, and desired to know whether I was capable of seconding his wonderful adroitness. The choice of disguise was left to me, and having learnt of the death of a rich Norman whose estates lay in the neighbourhood of Nottingham, I resolved to mingle with the beggars who usually accompany the funeral procession. On my head was an old hat adorned with cockle-shells ; I wore a pilgrim's dress, and carried a mighty staff, a sack of provisions, and a purse destined for gifts of money. My garments were so wretched, and I so much resembled a real beggar that even our merry companions were tempted to offer me an alms. About a mile from our retreat I fell in with several beggars who, like myself, were on their way to the Castle of the deceased noble. One of these rogues was apparently blind, another limped painfully, the others bore no distinctive signs beyond miserable rags and tatters.

" ' Here,' I said to myself, regarding them out of the corner of mine eye— ' here are fellows who will serve me for models. I will accost them, so as to be able to take a leaf out of their book.'

" ' Good day, brothers,' I cried heartily. ' I am right glad to meet you. Which way are you going ? '

" ' We are going along the road,' dryly replied the man whom I had more particularly addressed.

" The jester's companions eyed me with suspicion from head to foot.

" ' Might not this fellow be taken for the Tower of Linton Abbey ? ' quoth one of the beggars, stepping back a step or two.

" ' I might be taken for a man who fears no one,' I replied in a menacing tone.

"Come, come, peace!' growled another of the beggars.

"So be it,' I replied. 'But what is there to devour at the end of this road, that I see surging from all directions our holy fraternity of rags? Why do the bells of Linton Abbey toll so mournfully?'

"Because a Norman hath just died.'

"Are ye, then, going to his burial?'

"We are going to take our share of the largess which they distribute among poor devils like us on the occasion of a funeral; you are at liberty to accompany us.'

"I trow I am, and I owe you no thanks for the permission,' I replied scornfully.

"Long handle of a dirty broom,' cried the lustiest of the beggars, 'if that be so, we are not disposed to bear with thy foolish company any longer. Thou dost appear a very sorry rogue, and thy presence is distasteful to us. Go, and take as a parting gift this blow on thy pate.'

"As he said these words, the tall ragamuffin dealt me a blow on the head.

"This unexpected onslaught made me furious," continued Little John. "I fell on the rascal, and rained a volley of blows upon him.

"He was soon incapable of defending himself, and cried for mercy.

"Here's at you, lying dogs!' I cried, menacing the other miscreants with my staff.

"You would have laughed, I am sure, good friends, to have seen the blind man open his eyes and fearfully watch my movements, and the lame man run at the top of his speed toward the woods.

"I silenced the brawlers, who were shouting fit to deafen a man, and laid my staff soundly and well across their broad shoulders. A wallet, broken open by my blows, let fall some pieces of gold, and the rogue to whom they belonged fell on his knees upon his treasure, hoping, doubtless, to conceal it from me.

"Oho!' I cried, 'this puts another appearance on the matter, miserable ragamuffins, or rather thieves, that ye are. Give me instantly, to the last groat, all the money you possess, or I will beat you all into a pulp.'

"The cowards again sued for mercy, and as my arm was beginning to get tired of beating, beating, beating, I was merciful.

"When I left the beggars with my pockets full of their spoils, they could scarce stand up. I quickly took my way to the Forest, delighted with my prowess, for there is a certain justice in plundering thieves.

"Robin Hood, surrounded by his Merrie Men, was practising at archery.

"Well, Little John,' he cried as I appeared, 'are you back already? Had you not the courage to carry out your beggar's part to a finish?'

"Pardon me, dear Robin, I have done my duty, and my quest hath been productive. I bring back six hundred gold crowns.'

"Six hundred golden crowns!' he cried. 'Then you have plundered a Prince of the Church.'

"Nay, Captain, I gleaned that sum from members of the beggar tribe.'

"Robin looked grave.

"Explain yourself, John,' he said to me. 'I cannot believe that you have robbed the poor.'

"I recounted the adventure to Robin, observing that beggars with pockets full of gold could only be professional thieves.

"Robin was of my opinion, and smiled again."

"That was a good day's work," laughed Much—"six hundred golden crowns at one haul."

"That very evening," continued John, "I distributed the half of my booty among the poor in the neighbourhood of Sherwood."

"Good John!" cried Will, wringing the young man's hand.

"Generous Robin! you should say, William, for in acting thus I only obeyed the orders of my Chief."

"Here we are at Barnsdale," said Much; "but the way hath not seemed long to me."

"I shall tell that to my sister," cried Will, laughing.

"And I will add," replied Much, "that I never ceased to think of her for a single instant."



## CHAPTER VII

WILLIAM, Much, and Little John had been staying at Barnsdale for a week, and the happy household was preparing to celebrate the wedding of Winifred and Barbara. By Will Scarlett's orders the park and gardens of the Hall had been transformed into dancing-grounds; for the good-natured young man was constantly watching over the well-being of the world in general and the happiness of each in particular. Indefatigable in his efforts, he turned his hand to anything, busied himself over everything, and filled the house with his light-hearted mirth.

While working hard he talked and laughed, poking fun at Robin, tormenting Much. Suddenly a wild idea struck him, and he began to roar with laughter.

"What ails you, William?" asked Robin.

"My dear friend, I will leave you to guess the reason of my mirth," replied Will, "and I wager you will not succeed."

"It must be something very entertaining, seeing it doth amuse you so much that you laugh all by yourself."

"In sooth, 'tis highly entertaining. You know my six brothers? They are all built much on the same model—fair as corn, gentle, placid, brave, and honest."

"What is all this leading up to, Will?"

"To this: these good lads are unacquainted with love."

"Well?" asked Robin, smiling.

"Well," replied Will Scarlett, "an idea hath just struck me which might give us a good deal of amusement."

"What is it?"

"As you are aware, I have a great influence over my brothers, and this very day I will persuade them they ought all to marry."

Robin began to laugh.

"I will assemble them in a corner of the court-yard," Will went on, "and I will put into their heads the idea of taking each of them a wife on the same day as Much and Little John."

"It is impossible to do such a thing, my dear Will," responded Robin. "Your brothers are of too placid and phlegmatic a nature to be influenced by your words; besides, I know well they are not in love."

"So much the better; they will be obliged to pay their court to my sisters' young friends, and that will be a most pleasing sight. Picture to yourself for one moment the appearance of Gregory, the steady, awkward, simple fellow—of Gregory striving to make himself agreeable to a young woman. Come with me, Robin, for there is no time to lose; we can only give them three days in which to make their choice. I will call my brothers together, and in a grave voice deliver a fatherly oration to them."

"Marriage is a serious thing, Will, and ought not to be lightly treated. If your brothers, persuaded by your eloquence, consent to marry, and then later on are rendered unhappy through a thoughtless choice, will you not keenly regret having helped to make their whole life miserable?"

"Have no fears on that score, Robin; I mean to find my brothers young maidens worthy of the most tender love both now and in the future. I know, for one, a charming little creature who loves my brother Herbert passionately."

"That is not enough, Will. Is this maiden worthy to call Winifred and Barbara her sisters?"

"Without a doubt; and, what is more, I am certain that she will make an excellent wife."

"And hath Herbert already seen this young damsel?"

"Certainly he hath; but the poor artless fellow little imagines that he could be the object of such a preference. Several times I tried to make him perceive that he was always welcome at Mistress Anna Meadows' house. 'Twas but wasted labour, for Herbert did not understand me; he is so young, in spite of his twenty-nine years. I have a great friendship for a charming damsel who would suit Egbert perfectly in every respect; then Maude was speaking to me to-day of a maiden in this neighbourhood who thinketh Harold a mighty fine fellow. Thus, as you see, Robin, we have already a part of what is needful to carry out my project."

"Unfortunately, Will, 'tis not sufficient, seeing you have six brothers to marry off."

"Never distress yourself; I will go seek, and I shall find three more maidens."

"Very good. But when you have

found the damsels, do you think that your brothers will please them?"

"I am sure of it. My brothers are young and strong, fair to look upon—they resemble me in appearance," added Will, with a touch of self-conceit in his tone; "and if they be not so attractive as you are, Robin, if they are not exactly sweet-tempered or lively, at any rate there is naught in their looks to offend the eye of a wise and sensible girl—a girl who seeks a good husband. There is Herbert," he went on, turning towards a young man crossing a garden path; "I will call him. Herbert, come here, my lad."

"What dost want, Will?" replied the young man, as he came near them.

"I wish to speak with thee."

"I am listening, Will."

"That which I have to say doth concern thy brothers also; go seek them."

"I will do so at once."

Will remained thoughtful during the few moments which elapsed before Herbert's return.

The young men came running up, their faces wreathed in smiles.

"Here we are, William," said the eldest, joyfully. "To what must we set down thy wish to assemble us all around thee?"

"To a grave cause, my dear brothers. Will you allow me first to ask you all a question?"

The young men gave signs of assent.

"You love our father dearly, do you not?"

"Who dare doubt our love for him?" demanded Gregory.

"No one; that question is merely a preliminary. So, you love our father dearly. You have never seen him behave otherwise than as a man of honour, a true Saxon?"

"Certainly not," cried Egbert; "but, in the name of Heaven, Will, what do thy words signify? Hath some one slandered our father's name? Point out the wretch to me, and I undertake to avenge the honour of the Gamwells."

"The honour of the Gamwells is unsullied, dear brothers; and if it had been soiled by a lie, the stain would have been already washed out in the slanderer's blood. I wish to speak to you of something less grave, but still very serious; only you must not interrupt me, an if you wish to hear the last words of my harangue before nightfall. Show your

approbation or disapprobation of my words by nodding or shaking your heads. Attend; I am about to begin again. The conduct of our father is that of an honourable man, and ought to serve as our guide and model."

"Yea," nodded the six fair heads with one accord.

"Our mother hath followed the same path," continued Will. "Her existence hath been the accomplishment of every duty, the example of every virtue?"

"Yea, yea!"

"How, then, have you been able to remain blind, with this picture of bliss before you? How can you be so ungrateful to Providence? How is it you refuse to accord to our parents a token of respect, tenderness, and gratitude?"

Will's brothers stared in astonishment, for they could make naught of his words.

"What mean you, William?" asked Gregory.

"I would say, Sirs, that, following the example of our father, you should marry, and by so doing prove your admiration of our father's conduct, who himself married."

"Oh, good Lord!" cried the youths, but little pleased.

"Marriage is happiness," Will continued. "Think how happy you will be when you have a dear little creature hanging on your arm like the flower on a vigorous plant, a dear little creature who will love you, think of you, and whose happiness you will be. Look around you, rogues, and you will see the sweet fruits of marriage. First of all, there are Maude and me, whom I am sure you must envy when we are playing with our dear little child. Then Robin and Marian. Think of Little John, and imitate that worthy lad's example. Do you want further proof of the happiness shed by heaven on young husbands and wives? Go and visit Halbert Lindsay and his pretty wife Grace; go down into the valley of Mansfield, and there you will find Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel. You are shockingly selfish to have never thought it was your duty to make a woman happy. Nay, do not shake your heads; you will never persuade any one that you are good and generous lads. I blush for the hardness of your hearts, and I am hurt by hearing everywhere: 'The sons of the old Knight have bad hearts.' I am resolved to put an end to such a state of



things, and I warn you that I intend you to marry."

"Really!" said Rupert, defiantly. "Well, I want no wife. Marriage may be a very fine thing, but at present it doth in no wise concern me."

"Thou dost not want a wife?" replied Will. "Very possibly; but thou shalt take one, for I know a maiden who will make thee take back that opinion."

Rupert shook his head.

"Come now, speak freely; dost love any one woman more than another?"

"Yea," replied the young man, gravely.

"Bravo!" cried Will, quite taken aback at this unexpected confidence, for Rupert shunned the society of girls. "Who is she? Tell us her name."

"It is my mother," said the simple lad.

"Thy mother!" repeated Will, a little scornfully. "Thou dost teach us nothing new. I have long been aware that thou dost love, venerate, and respect our mother. I am not speaking of the filial affection which we have for our parents; I speak of another thing—of love, true love. Love is a sentiment which . . . a tender feeling that . . . well, a sensation which makes the heart leap toward a young woman. One can adore one's mother and cherish a charming maiden at the same time."

"I do not wish to marry, either," said Gregory.

"Dost think thou hast a will of thine own, my boy?" replied Will. "Wilt soon be shown thine error. Canst tell me thy reason for refusing to marry?"

"No," murmured Gregory, fearfully.

"Wilt live for thyself alone?"

Gregory remained silent.

"Hast thou the audacity to answer me," cried Will, with an affectation of indignation, "that thou dost share the opinion of the rascals who despise the society of women?"

"I did not say that, and still less do I think it; but . . ."

"There is no *but* which can hold good in the face of reasons so conclusive as those which I do give you all. Therefore, prepare to set up house, my lads; for you will be married at the same time as Wini-fred and Barbara."

"What," cried Egbert, "in three days? Thou art mad, Will; we have not time to find wives."

"Leave that to me; I will undertake to satisfy you better even than your natural modesty could dare to hope."

"As for me, I positively refuse to relinquish my liberty," said Gregory.

"I did not think to find such selfishness in a son of my mother's," said William, in a wounded tone.

Poor Gregory blushed.

"See here, Gregory," said Rupert. "Let Will do as he doth purpose; he only wishes our happiness, after all, and if he will have the kindness to seek me a wife, why, I will take her. Thou knowest well, brother, that resistance is useless; William hath always done what he would with us."

"Since William doth insist upon marrying us off," added Stephen, "I would as lieve wed in three days as in six months."

"I am of Stephen's opinion," said the timid Harold.

"I give way to force," added Gregory, "for Will is a very devil; he would surely end sooner or later in dragging me into his nets."

"Thou wilt soon thank me for having overthrown thy false allegations, and thy joy shalt be my reward."

"I will marry to oblige thee, Will," said Gregory, again; "but I hope that in return thou wilt give me a pretty little bride."

"I will introduce you one and all to young and charming maidens, and, if ye do not find them adorable, ye may spread it abroad that Will Scarlett doth not know a pretty face."

"I can spare thee the trouble of hunting about for me," said Herbert, "my wife is already found."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Will, "you will see, Robin, that my fine fellows are provided for, and their apparent distaste for marriage is but a merry jest. Who is thy beloved, Herbert?"

"Anna Meadows. We had arranged that our marriage should take place at the same time as my sisters'."

"Sly dog!" said Will, giving his brother a dig in the ribs. "I spoke to thee yesterday of the maiden, and thou hadst never a word to say."

"'Twas only this morning my dear Anna gave me a satisfactory reply."

"Very good; but when I alluded to her love for thee, thou didst make no response."

"I had none to make. Thou saidst to me, 'Miss Anna is very pretty, she hath a good temper, she will make an

excellent wife.' As I have long known all that, thy reflections were but an echo of mine own. Thou didst add further, 'Mistress Anna loveth thee well.' I believed it, thou didst think it; we were each as wise as the other, and consequently I had nothing to tell thee."

"Well answered, discreet Herbert; and I see, from my brothers' silence, that thou alone art worthy of mine esteem."

"I had already made up my mind to marry," said Harold; "Maude inspired me with the wish."

"Hath Maude chosen thy wife?" asked Will, with a laugh.

"Yea, brother; Maude said it was very agreeable to live with a charming little wife, and I agree with her."

"Hurrah!" cried Will, in delight. "My good brothers, will you consent willingly, with hand on heart, to be married on the same day as Winifred and Barbara?"

"We consent," answered the young men, who had no prospective wives.

"Hurrah for marriage!" cried Will, again, throwing his bonnet in the air.

"Hurrah!" repeated the six voices, with one accord.

"Will," said Egbert, "think of our brides; thou must haste to present us to them, for sure they would wish to converse a little with us before wedding us."

"That is very like. Come with me, all. I have a pretty maiden for Egbert, and I think I know three girls who would suit Gregory, Rupert, and Stephen admirably."

"My dear Will," said Rupert, "I wish for a fair, slim maiden; I would not care to marry too stout a wife."

"I know thy romantic taste, and I will deal with thee accordingly; thy betrothed is frail as a reed and pretty as an angel. Come, my lads, I will present you one after another; ye shall pay your court, and if ye do not know how to please a woman, I will advise you, or, better still, I will take your places beside your lady-loves."

"What a pity 'tis that thou canst not marry our future wives, brother Will; things would go so much more smoothly then."

William shook his fist at his brother, took Gregory by the arm, and set out from Barnsdale, accompanied by the procession of lovers.

The seven brothers soon reached the village, where Herbert separated himself

from his companions to pay a visit to his beloved; Harold disappeared some moments later; and Will, accompanied by the rest of his brothers, made his way to the home of the maiden destined for Egbert.

Mistress Lucy opened the house-door herself. She was a charming girl with a rosy face and archly sparkling eyes. Her smile expressed goodness, and she was always smiling.

William presented his brother to Mistress Lucy, and told her of Egbert's good qualities. He was so eloquent and persuasive that the maiden, with her mother's consent, allowed Will to hope that his wishes would be accomplished.

Delighted at Mistress Lucy's complaisance, William left Egbert to continue his wooing alone, and went off with his brothers.

Hardly were they out of the house ere Stephen remarked to Will, "I wish I could speak with as much wit, animation, and grace as thou dost use in conversation."

"Nothing is easier than to speak gracefully to a woman, my dear lad. The words themselves are of little importance; it is quite enow to tell the truth, and that right heartily, without embellishing it with fine speeches."

"Is she whom thou hast chosen for me comely?"

"Let me know thy taste; tell me of the kind of beauty thou dost admire."

"Oh," replied Stephen, "I am not very hard to please; a wife like Maude would suit me well enow!"

"A wife like Maude would suit thee well enow!" repeated Will, overcome with astonishment. "That I can readily believe, and I would have thee know that thou art not at all moderate in thy desires. By St. Paul! Stephen, a wife like Maude is a rare thing to find—if not quite undiscoverable. Know well, poor ambitious lad, that there doth not exist on earth any one to be compared with my dear little wife!"

"Dost think so, Will?"

"I am certain of it," replied Maude's husband, in a peremptory tone.

"Indeed, I did not know it. You must excuse my ignorance, Will; I have not travelled yet," replied the young man, innocently. "But if thou couldst give me a wife whose beauty was of Maude's kind . . ."



"No one in the world doth possess one of Maude's perfections," replied Will, half irritated by his brother's desire.

"Very well, then, Will, choose a wife for me after thine own taste," replied Stephen, in a disconsolate tone.

"Then thou wilt be happy with her. First of all, I will tell thee her name; it is Minnie Meadows."

"I know her," said Stephen, smiling. "She is a young girl with black eyes and curly hair. Minnie was in the habit of making fun of me; she said that I was foolish and sleepy. However, I like her, in spite of her teasing. One day, when we were by ourselves, she laughingly asked me if I had ever kissed a maid in my life."

"What reply didst make to Minnie's question?"

"I answered that certainly I had kissed my sisters. Minnie went off into fits of laughter, and asked me again, 'Have you never kissed any other woman but your sisters?' 'By your leave, mistress,' I replied, 'I have kissed my mother.'"

"Thy mother, thou silly fool! Well, what did she say to thee after thy fine answer?"

"She laughed louder than ever. Then she asked me if I did not wish to kiss any other women besides my mother and sisters. I made answer, 'Nay, mistress.'"

"Thou great ninny! thou shouldest have kissed Minnie; that was the reply due to her questions."

"I never thought of it," answered Stephen, quietly.

"How did ye part after this pleasant conversation?"

"Minnie called me a gaby; then she ran away, laughing still."

"I thoroughly approve of the epithet applied to thee by thy future wife. Doth she really suit thee?"

"Yea, but what shall I say to her when we are alone?"

"Thou must say all sorts of pretty things to her."

"I understand. But tell me, Will, how must I begin a pretty sentence? It is alway difficult to think of the first word."

"When thou art alone with Minnie, thou wilt tell her thou dost wish to receive lessons in the art of kissing young maidens, and as thou art speaking, thou

wilt kiss her. The first obstacle surmounted, thou wilt not find it difficult to continue the progress."

"I should never dare to be so bold," said Stephen, timidly.

"I should never dare!" repeated Will, in a mocking tone. "Upon my word, Stephen, if I were not sure that thou wert a brave and valiant forester, I should take thee for a girl dressed in man's clothes."

Stephen blushed.

"But," he said hesitatingly, "if the maiden should be distressed at my behaviour?"

"Well, thou wilt kiss her again, and say to her, 'Sweet mistress, adorable Minnie, I shall not cease from kissing you until you do forgive me.' Beside which, bear this in mind, and remember it on occasion, a girl never seriously objects to a kiss from the man she loves. But if her lover displeases her, the case is altered; then she defends herself, and she defends herself so well that you cannot begin again. Thou needst not fear a real refusal from Minnie. I have learnt from a good source that the little maid is friendly disposed toward thee."

Stephen plucked up courage, and promised William to get over his shyness.

Minnie was alone in the house.

"Good day, sweet Minnie," said Will, taking the extended hand of the maiden, who blushed prettily as she greeted him. "I have brought my brother Stephen, who hath something of importance to tell you."

"He!" cried the girl. "And what very important thing can he have to say to me?"

"I must tell you," responded Stephen, quickly, becoming pale with fright, "that I wish to take some lessons . . ."

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Will. "Not so fast, my boy. Dear Minnie, Stephen will explain to you presently what he wishes you to grant him of your kindness. Meanwhile, allow me to announce my sisters' marriages."

"I have heard of the festivities which are on foot at the Hall."

"I hope, dear Minnie, that you will take part in our merrymakings."

"With pleasure, Will; the maidens of the village are all busied with their dresses, and I myself shall be overjoyed to dance at a wedding ball."

"You will bring your lover, will you not, Minnie?"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Stephen. "Thou dost forget, Will . . ."

"I forget naught," said Will. "Be so good as to hold thy tongue for a few minutes. You will bring your lover, eh, Minnie?" continued the young man, repeating his question.

"I have no lover," replied the maiden.

"Is that true, Minnie?" asked Will.

"It is quite true; I know not of any whom I could call lover."

"If you wish it, Minnie, I will be your lover," cried Stephen, taking the girl's hand in one of his own trembling ones.

"Bravo, Stephen!" said Will.

"Yea," continued the young man, encouraged by his brother's approbation, "yea, Minnie, I will be your lover; on the wedding day I will seek you, and we will be married at the same time as my sisters."

Astonished at this abrupt declaration, the maiden did not know how to answer.

"Listen to me, dear Minnie," said Will. "My brother hath long loved you, and his silence cometh not from his heart but from the extreme timidity of his nature. I assure you upon mine honour that Stephen speaks with the sincerity of love. You are not betrothed; Stephen is a fine lad, better still, he is a good and excellent lad, and will be a husband worthy of you. If we have your consent and that of your family, your marriage could be celebrated at the same time as my sisters'."

"Really, Will," replied the girl, looking down in confusion, "I was so little prepared for your proposal; 'tis so hasty and unexpected, I do not know how to reply."

"Reply thus: 'I take Stephen for my husband,'" said that youth, put quite at his ease by the pretty girl's sweet looks. "I have a very great affection for you, Minnie," continued he, "and I should be the happiest of men an if you would give me your hand."

"'Tis impossible for me to reply to your honourable proposal to-day," said the maiden, bowing gracefully and playfully to her timid lover.

"I will leave you alone, good friends," William continued. "My presence embarrasses you, and I am certain that if Minnie loves Winifred and Barbara, she will be glad to call them sisters."

"I love Winifred and Barbara with all my heart," replied the girl, softly.

"Then," said Stephen, "I may hope, mistress, that in consideration of your love for my sisters, you will treat me kindly?"

"We shall see," said the girl, coquettishly.

"Good-bye, charming Minnie," said William, with a smile. "I pray you be good and kind to the fine fellow who loves you so well, even though he doth not testify very eloquently to his love."

"You are too severe, Will," replied the maiden, gravely. "I do not think Stephen could possibly have expressed himself better."

"Well, I see that you are really a most excellent young woman, sweet Minnie," said Will. "Permit me to kiss your hand and to say once more, 'Good-bye, sister mine.'"

"Should I reply to William, 'Good-bye, brother mine?'" asked Minnie, turning to Stephen.

"Yea, dear lady, yea," cried Stephen, joyfully. "Say to him, 'Good-bye, brother,' so that he may go quickly."

"Thou dost make progress, my lad," laughed Will. "My lessons are evidently bearing fruit."

With which William kissed Minnie, and went on his way with Gregory and Rupert.

"Now 'tis our turn, is't not, Will?" said Gregory. "I am impatient to see my future wife."

"And so am I," added Rupert.

"Where doth she live?" asked Gregory.

"Shall I see my future bride to-day?" continued Rupert.

"Your very natural curiosity shall be satisfied," replied Will. "Your future wives are cousins, and are called Mabel and Editha Harrowfield."

"I know them both," said Gregory.

"I know them too," added Rupert.

"They are pretty girls," Will continued, "and I am not surprised that their charming faces have attracted your attention. I have hardly been eighteen months at Barnsdale, but there is not a maiden in the county, blonde or brunette, that I do not know. Like yourselves, mine attention hath already been attracted by Mabel and Editha."

"I never saw a fellow to equal thee, Will," said Gregory; "thou dost know all



the women, and art always roving. Of a truth we resemble thee but little."

"Unhappily for yourselves, my lads; for did you resemble me the least bit in the world, I should not be obliged to seek wives for you, or have to teach you how to make love to them."

"Oh," replied Gregory, firmly, "it will not be difficult for us to make love to Mabel and Editha. Rupert thinks Mabel charming, and I am persuaded Editha is a good creature, so I shall just ask her an if she will be the wife of Gregory Gamwell."

"Such a question must not be put abruptly, my good lad, or thou wilt run the risk of a refusal."

"Tell me, then, how I should explain mine intentions to Editha. I do not know the tricks of cunning. I wish to have her for wife, and I should think it but natural to say, 'Editha, I am ready to marry you.'"

"Thou wilt embarrass the maiden overmuch, an thou dost shoot such a declaration at her point blank."

"What must I do, then?" asked Gregory, in despair.

"Thou must gently lead the conversation in the way thou wouldst follow; speak first of the ball to be given at the Hall in three days' time, of the happiness of Little John and Much; make a skilful allusion to thine approaching marriage, and, in this connection, ask Editha, as I have asked Minnie, if she thinks of being married, and if she will come to the feast at Barnsdale with a lover."

"What if Editha reply, 'Yea, Gregory, yea, I will go to the ball with a lover'?"

"Well, then thou wilt say, 'Mistress, that lover is myself.'"

"But," Gregory ventured once again, "what if Editha doth refuse my hand?"

"Then you will offer it to Mabel."

"And what of me?" said Rupert.

"Editha will not refuse," answered Will; "therefore never be uneasy: each of you shall have the girl of his heart to wife."

The young men crossed the village green, and stopped before a pretty house, upon the doorstep of which stood two girls.

"Good morrow, fair Editha and Mabel," said Will, greeting the cousins. "My brothers and I are come to ask you to a wedding dance."

"Welcome, fair Sirs," said Mabel, in a

voice as sweet as the song of a bird. "Do us the honour to enter and partake of some refreshment."

"A thousand thanks, charming Mabel," replied Will. "So kind and gracious an offer should not meet with a refusal. We will drink your health and happiness in a flagon of ale."

Editha and Mabel, who were kind-hearted and sprightly maidens, received the brothers' compliments with much laughter; then, after an hour's merry conversation, Gregory summoned up his courage to ask Editha timidly whether she intended going to the Hall in the company of her lover.

"I shall not be accompanied by one lover alone, but by half a dozen merry lads," replied Editha, gaily.

This most unexpected answer threw poor Gregory into great confusion. He sighed, and turning to his brother, whispered him aside—

"'Tis all over with me; dost not think so? I cannot compete with half a dozen aspirants. Really, I have no luck, and must e'en remain a bachelor all my days."

"Since thou dost not wish to marry, that will suit thee," said Will, teasingly.

"I had not thought of it, that was all; but since the idea entered my mind, I have been tormented with the fear of not being able to find a wife."

"Thou shalt have Editha; let me manage it. Mistress Editha," said William, "our visit had a double object. First we wished to invite you to our family festivities, then I would present to you, not a gallant for the dance, an adorer for four and twenty hours—you have six of those, and the seventh would cut a sorry figure—but an honest lad, steady, good, rich, and one who will be proud and happy to offer you his heart, his hand, and his name."

Mistress Editha looked pensive.

"Are you speaking seriously, Will?" she asked.

"Quite seriously. Gregory loves you; however, he is here himself, and if you close your eyes to the eloquence of his looks, pray be so kind as to give heed to the sincerity of his words. I will leave to him the pleasure of pleading a cause which is, I believe, half won already," added the young man, interpreting in his brother's favour the joyous smile which hovered on Editha's lips. William

allowed Gregory to approach the maiden, and looked at Rupert to see whether he required any help, intending to go to his assistance, if it were necessary. But Rupert did not require his aid; he was talking to Mabel in a low voice and holding her hands as he knelt on one knee before her, apparently thanking her for some favour.

"Good," quoth Will to himself, "he can look after himself; I can leave him to his own resources."

He watched the lovers for a few minutes, and then, without attracting their attention, he left the room and ran back to the Hall.

There he met Robin, Marian, and Maude, to whom he related what had happened, depicting to them the timorous embarrassment of the prospective bridegrooms, but he ended in recognising that the young men had brought themselves out of their difficult positions very well.

Towards evening the brothers returned to the Hall radiant with joy. Their victory was complete, and they had one and all obtained the consent of their lady loves.

The parents of the maidens thought it a piece of folly to marry with such precipitation, but the honour of entering the noble family of Gamwell removed all their scruples.

Sir Guy, cleverly prepared by Robin to approve of his sons' choice, welcomed the six pretty girls with great kindness. The eight marriages were celebrated on one day with much pomp, and each was delighted at the happiness which had fallen to his share.

## CHAPTER VIII

**A** MONTH after the events just related, Robin Hood, his wife, and the whole of his band of Merrie Men were installed once again beneath the trees of Sherwood Forest.

About this time, a number of Normans, liberally paid for their military services by Henry II., came to take possession of the domains given them by the King's generosity. Some of these Normans, who were obliged to cross Sherwood Forest to reach their new estates, were constrained to pay their way liberally by

the merry band of outlaws. The newcomers protested loudly, and carried their complaints to the authorities in the town of Nottingham. But these complaints were taxed with exaggeration, and received no reply, and the reason of this apathy on the part of the Reeve and other important personages was as follows.

Many of Robin Hood's men were related to the inhabitants of Nottingham, and quite naturally these latter used their influence with the civil and military authorities to prevent any rigorous measures being taken against the Foresters. These worthy men were terribly afraid that if, in consequence of a successful attack, the Merrie Men were driven from their green dwelling-place, they might some morning have the melancholy satisfaction of seeing one of their own kinsmen hanging by the neck from the town gallows.

However, as it was necessary to make a pretence of righteous indignation and justice, they doubled the reward promised to any one who should succeed in capturing Robin Hood. Whoever applied for it could at once obtain a warrant for arresting the famous Outlaw. Many men of great physical strength or of a determined spirit had made the attempt, but an unexpected thing happened—they had all become, by their own wish, members of the band of merry Foresters.

One morning Robin and Will Scarlett were strolling through the Forest when Much suddenly appeared before them, streaming with perspiration and panting for breath.

"What hath happened, Much?" asked Robin, anxiously. "Are you pursued? You are soaking with perspiration."

"Never fear, Robin," replied the young man, wiping his crimson face. "Thanks be to Heaven, I have had no dangerous encounter. I have only come from a bout with quarter-staves with Peaceful Arthur. Good Lord! the lad hath the strength of a giant in his arm."

"You speak truly, my dear Much, and 'tis indeed a rough job to fight with Arthur when he is in earnest . . ."

"Arthur always keeps cool," replied Much; "but as he is ignorant of the real rules of the game, he owes his success only to his tremendous muscle."

"Did he make you cry for quarter?"

"I should think so. But for that, he would have knocked all the breath out of



me. At this moment he is trying a bout with Little John, but with such an adversary Arthur's defeat cannot be doubted, for when he begins to strike hard, Little John doth e'en lift his staff and give him some shrewd blows on the shoulders, to teach him to moderate the transports of his strength."

"For what reason did you engage with the indomitable Arthur?" asked Robin.

"Without rhyme or reason, simply to pass an hour agreeably and to give our limbs healthy exercise."

"Arthur is a terrible fighter," said Robin, "and one day he overcame me in a bout with quarter-staves."

"You!" cried Will.

"Yea, cousin, he treated me somewhat after the fashion in which he hath handled Much; the rascal used his oaken staff like a bar of iron."

"How was it that he beat you? Where did the bout take place?" asked Will, curiously.

"The match took place in the Forest, and this is how I made Arthur's acquaintance. I was walking by myself down a lonely path in the wood, when I saw the gigantic Arthur leaning upon an iron ferruled staff, with eyes and mouth wide open watching a herd of deer within a few feet of him. His gigantic appearance, the air of candid innocence which overspread his large face, made me wish to amuse myself at his expense. I glided dexterously behind him, and accosted him by a vigorous blow with the fist between his shoulders. Arthur started, turned his head, and glared at me wrathfully.

"'Who art thou?' said I to him, 'and what dost thou mean by wandering in the wood? Thou hast all the appearance of a robber going to steal the deer. Be so good as to clear off at once. I am the Keeper of this part of the Forest, and I will not suffer the presence of rascals of thy kind.'

"'Well,' he replied carelessly, 'try and remove me if thou dost wish it, but I do not intend to go. Call for help, if it be thy good pleasure; I will not oppose thee.'

"'I need call for no one to enforce the law or my wishes, my fine fellow. I am accustomed to trust to mine own resources, which, as thou mayst see, are worthy of respect. I have two good arms, a sword, and a bow and arrows.'

"'My little forester,' said Arthur,

looking me up and down from head to foot disdainfully, 'if I gave thee a single blow on the fingers with my staff, thou wouldst not be able to use either sword or bow.'

"'Speak civilly, my lad,' I replied, 'an thou wish not to get a sound thrashing.'

"'How now, little friend, whip an oak with a reed! Whom dost take thyself for, then, young prodigy of valour? Learn that I care not for thee the least bit in the world. However, an if thou wish to fight, I am thy man.'

"'Thou hast no sword,' I observed.

"'I need none when I have my staff.'

"'Then I must take a staff of the same length as thine.'

"'So be it,' said he, putting himself on his guard.

"I immediately dealt him the first blow, and I saw the blood gush from his forehead and stream down his cheeks. Staggering under the blow, he made a step backward. I lowered my weapon, but seeing the movement, which no doubt appeared to him an expression of triumph, he set himself again to wield his staff with an extraordinary strength and cleverness. With such violence did he strike out that I had hardly strength to ward off his blows and keep my staff in my clenched hands. In leaping back to avoid a terrible attack, I neglected to keep up my guard, and he took advantage of it to deal me the most terrific crack on the skull I have ever received. I fell back as though pierced by an arrow, but I did not lose consciousness, and again sprang to my feet. The combat, suspended for an instant, began again; Arthur rained his blows upon me with such tremendous force, he scarce gave me time to defend myself. Thus we fought for nearly four hours. We made the echoes of the old wood ring with our blows, revolving round one another like two wild boars when they fight. At length, thinking there was not much use in continuing a struggle in which there was little to gain, not even the satisfaction of thrashing my adversary, I threw down my staff.

"'Enow,' I said to him; 'let us finish the quarrel. We might knock each other about until to-morrow and both be ground to powder without winning aught thereby. I give thee the free run of the Forest, for thou art a brave lad.'

"'Gramercy for that great favour,' he replied disdainfully. 'I have purchased the right to go my own way by the aid of

my staff ; therefore it is to that rather than to thee my thanks are due.'

" 'That is true, my brave lad, but thou wouldst have found it difficult to defend thy right with thy staff alone to enforce it. Thou wouldst find some doughty opponent in the green wood, and thou couldst only preserve thy liberty at the cost of broken crowns and aching limbs. Believe me, life in the town even would be preferable to that which thou wouldst lead here.'

" 'However,' replied Arthur, 'I am fain to dwell in the old Forest.'

"My valiant adversary's answer made me consider," continued Robin. "I looked at his tall figure, the amiable frankness of his face, and I told myself that the attachment of such a young blade as this might be to the advantage of our community."

" 'Then thou dost not like living in the town ? ' I asked him.

" 'Nay,' he replied, 'I am aweary of being the slave of these cursed Normans. I am tired of hearing myself called "dog, knave, serf." My master hath applied to me this morning some of the worst epithets in his vocabulary, and, not content with baiting me with his viperish tongue, wished to strike me. I did not wait for the blow. I found a stick within reach of my hand, and used it, giving him a blow over the shoulders that knocked him senseless. That done, I fled.'

" 'What is thy trade ? ' I asked him.

" 'I am a tanner,' he answered, 'and I have lived for several years in the county of Nottingham.'

" 'Well, my fine friend,' I said to him, 'if thou have not too great a liking for your trade, canst say good-bye to it, and come and live here. I am Robin Hood. Is the name known to thee ? '

" 'For sure it is ; but are you Robin Hood ? You told me just now that you were one of the Keepers of the Forest.'

" 'I am Robin Hood, I give thee my word of honour,' I replied, holding out my hand to the poor lad, who was overcome by surprise. 'Upon my soul and conscience ! '

" 'Then I am very glad to have met you,' added Arthur, joyfully, 'for I came to seek you, generous Robin Hood. When you told me that you were one of the Keepers of the Forest I believed you, and should not have dared to tell you my reason for coming to Sherwood. I wish to join your band, and if you will accept me as a companion you will have no more

devoted or more faithful follower than Peaceful Arthur, the tanner of Nottingham town.'

" 'Thy frankness pleaseth me, Arthur,' I answered him, 'and I consent gladly to admit thee as one of the Merrie Men who form my band. Our laws are few and simple, but they must be observed. On every other point thou shalt have complete liberty, and in addition to that thou wilt be well clothed, well nourished, and well treated.'

" 'My heart swells as I listen to you, Robin Hood, and the thought of being one of your band makes me very happy. I am not quite the stranger you might imagine, for Little John is a kinsman of mine. My maternal uncle married John's mother, who was a sister of Sir Guy Gamwell. Shall I see Little John soon ? I am all impatience to do so.'

" 'I will bring him hither,' I said, and wound my horn.

"Some minutes later Little John appeared.

"At sight of our blood-bespattered faces and frightful bruises, Little John stopped short.

" 'What is it, Robin ? ' he cried, startled. 'Your face is in a frightful state.'

" 'I have been thrashed,' I replied calmly, 'and the culprit stands before thee.'

" 'If that rascal hath beaten you, he must wield his staff very prettily,' cried Little John. 'Well, I will repay with interest the blows he hath given thee. Step forward, my fine lad.'

" 'Stay thy hand, friend John, and give it to a faithful ally, to a cousin ; this young man is called Arthur.'

" 'Arthur of Nottingham, known as Peaceful Arthur ? ' questioned John.

" 'The same,' replied Arthur. 'We have not met since our childhood, but all the same I recognised thee, Cousin John.'

" 'I cannot say as much,' said John, with his simple frankness. 'I do not recall thy features, but that matters little ; thou art welcome, Cousin, and thou wilt find good and merry hearts in the green wood.'

"Arthur and John embraced each other, and the remainder of the day passed merrily."

"Have you ever striven against Arthur since that day ? " Will asked Robin.

"I have had no opportunity of doing so as yet ; but it is probable that I should be



vanquished again, and that would be for the third time."

"What, for the third time?" cried Will.

"Yea, Jasper the Tinker gave me a sound drubbing."

"Really? When was that? Doubtless before he was enrolled in the band?"

"Yea," replied Robin. "I am in the habit of proving the courage and strength of a man for myself before putting my confidence in him. I do not wish for companions with weak heads and hearts. One morning I met Jasper the Tinker on the road to Nottingham. You know his vigorous broad-shouldered person, and I need give you no description of the jolly rascal; his looks pleased me, as he walked with a firm step, whistling a gay air. I advanced to meet him.

"'Good day, my friend,' said I to him. 'I see thou art a traveller. 'Tis said there is bad news abroad; is that true?'"

"'What news dost speak of?' he asked. 'I know of none worth naming. I come from Bamborough, and am a tin-smith by trade, and I think only of my work.'"

"'The news in question ought to interest thee all the same, my fine fellow. I have heard that ten of you Tinkers have just been put in the stocks for being drunk.'"

"'Thy news is not worth a groat,' he replied; 'but if all who drank were put in the stocks, thou wouldst certainly take the first place there, for thou hast not the air of a man who despiseth good wine.'"

"'In truth, I am no enemy to the bottle, and I do not think there is a jovial heart in all the world that despiseth wine. But what brings thee hither from Bamborough? For assuredly it was not the interests of thy trade.'"

"'It was not my trade, in sooth,' responded Jasper. 'I am seeking a robber called Robin Hood. A reward of one hundred golden crowns is promised to any one who can capture him, and I much desire to gain that reward.'"

"'How thinkest to capture Robin Hood?' I asked the Tinker, for I was greatly surprised at the calm and serious way in which he made this strange confidence.

"'I have an order for his arrest, signed by the King,' Jasper made answer.

"'Is the order strictly in rule?'"

"'Perfectly; it empowereth me to

arrest Robin, and proposeth me the reward.'

"'Thou speakest of this arrest, already so often vainly attempted, as if it were the easiest thing in the world to accomplish.'

"'It will not be very difficult for me,' replied the Tinker. 'I am of solid build, I have muscles of iron, a tried courage, and much patience. Thus can I well hope to catch my man.'

"'Wert thou to meet accidentally, shouldst recognise him?'"

"'I have never seen him; an if I knew his face, my task would be half accomplished. Art any wiser than I am in this respect?'"

"'Yea, I have met Robin Hood twice, and perchance it would be possible for me to help thee in thine enterprise.'

"'My fine lad, an thou canst do that,' said he, 'I will e'en give thee a large share of the reward I shall gain.'

"'I will point out a place where thou couldst meet him,' I replied; 'but before going any further in our undertaking, I should like to see the order for his arrest; to be valid it must be drawn up according to rule.'

"'I am greatly obliged for thy precaution,' answered the Tinker, defiantly, 'but I shall confide the paper to no one. I know it is valid and in order; that satisfies me, and so much the worse for thee if thou dost not believe it. Robin Hood shall see the King's order when I have him in my power, bound hand and foot.'

"'Perchance thou art right, my good man,' I replied indifferently. 'I am not so anxious to assure myself of the value of thy permit as thou seemest to think. I am going to Nottingham as much from curiosity as from idleness, for I heard this morning that Robin Hood was going into the town, and if thou wilt come with me I will show thee the famous Outlaw.'

"'I will take thee at thy word, my lad,' said the Tinker, quickly, 'but an if, when we arrive at our destination, I see any sign of deceit on thy part, thou shalt make acquaintance with my staff.'

"I shrugged my shoulders in disdain. He saw the action, and began to laugh.

"'Thou wilt not regret having helped me,' said he, 'for I am not an ungrateful man.'

"When we arrived at Nottingham we

stopped at Pat's Inn, and I asked the master of the house for a bottle of a special kind of beer. The Tinker, who had been on his feet since early morning, was literally dying of thirst, and the beer soon disappeared. After the beer I called for wine, and after the wine again for beer, and so on for an hour. Without perceiving it, the Tinker had emptied every bottle set before him, for I, being by nature averse to the immoderate use of wine, contented myself with a few glasses. I need hardly tell you that the worthy fellow became completely intoxicated. Then he began to regale me with a boastful account of all he would do to capture Robin Hood, and how, after taking the Chief of the Merrie Men prisoner, he would arrest the whole band, and take them all to London. The King would reward his bravery by giving him a fortune and the privileges of a grand dignitary of the State; but at the very moment when the illustrious conqueror was on the point of marrying an English Princess, he fell from his chair, and rolled, fast asleep, beneath the table.

"I took the Tinker's purse; it contained, besides money, the order for my arrest. I paid our expenses, and told the Innkeeper—

"When this fellow awakes, you will ask him to pay for our refreshment; then, if he asks you who I am and where I am to be found, you will answer that I live in the Forest, and that my name is Robin Hood."

"The Innkeeper, a worthy man, in whom I have every confidence, began to laugh gaily.

"Be easy, Master Robin," said he, "I will faithfully carry out your orders; and should the Tinker wish to see you again, he will only have to seek you."

"You understand me, my good fellow," I replied, picking up the Tinsmith's bag. "And there is every reason to believe the good man will not let me wait his visit for long."

"Saying which, I bade the Innkeeper farewell, and left the house.

"After sleeping for some hours, Jasper awoke. He soon became aware of my absence and of the loss of his purse.

"Landlord," he shouted, in a voice of thunder, "I am robbed, I am ruined! Where is the thief?"

"Of what thief do you speak?" asked the host, with the greatest coolness.

"Of my companion. He hath plundered me."

"Well, that doth not suit me at all," said the Innkeeper, with an appearance of anger, "for you have here a long shot to settle."

"A shot to settle!" groaned Jasper. "I have naught left, naught whatever; the wretch hath utterly despoiled me. I had in my purse a warrant of arrest under the King's hand; and by the help of that warrant I might have made my fortune, I might have captured Robin Hood. This thief of a stranger promised to help me, and was going to conduct me into the presence of the outlaw chief. Oh, the rogue! He hath abused my confidence and carried off my precious paper!"

"How?" returned the Innkeeper. "You confided to that young man the evil intentions that have brought you to Nottingham?"

"The Tinker threw a sidelong glance at his host.

"It appears," said he, "that you would not lend a helping hand to the brave fellow who would wish to arrest Robin Hood?"

"By my faith," replied the Innkeeper, "Robin Hood hath never done me harm, and his quarrels with the rulers of the land do not concern me. But how the devil," continued the man, "did you come to be drinking joyously with him, and showing him your little paper, instead of seizing his person?"

"The Tinker stared wildly at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you have lost an opportunity of capturing Robin Hood."

"How so?"

"Oh, what a dolt you be! Robin Hood was here just now. You entered together, you drank together, and I thought you were one of his band."

"I drank with Robin Hood! I clinked glasses with Robin Hood!" cried the astounded Tinker.

"Yea, a thousand times yea!"

"This is too much!" exclaimed the poor man, seating himself heavily in a chair. "But he shall never say that he tricked Jasper the Tinker with impunity. Oh, villain! Oh, thief!" bellowed the Tinker, "wait, wait, wait while I seek thee out."

"I would fain see the colour of my money before you go," said the Innkeeper.



“‘What is the amount of your bill?’ asked Jasper, wrathfully.

“‘Ten shillings,’ replied the host, overjoyed at the unhappy Tinker’s furious countenance.

“‘I have not a penny to give you,’ returned Jasper, turning out his pockets; ‘but as guarantee for the payment of this unlucky debt, I will leave my tools with you. They are worth three or four times what you claim. Can you tell me where to find Robin Hood?’

“‘Not this evening, but to-morrow you will find your man hunting the King’s deer.’

“‘Well, then, to-morrow the robber shall be captured,’ rejoined the Tinker, with an assurance which gave the Inn-keeper food for thought; for,” added Robin, “when recounting this to me, the host avowed that he greatly feared Jasper’s rage against me.

“The next morning I started in quest, not of the deer, but of the Tinsmith, and I had not long to seek. As soon as he perceived me, he uttered a cry, and threw himself upon me, brandishing an enormous cudgel.

“‘What clown is this,’ I cried, ‘who dares to present himself before me in so unseemly a manner?’

“‘It is no clown,’ replied the Tinker, ‘but an ill-used man, resolved to take his revenge.’

“Saying this, he attacked me with his cudgel; but I placed myself beyond his reach and drew my sword.

“‘Stop,’ I said to him. ‘We will fight with equal weapons; I must have a cudgel.’

“Jasper suffered me quietly to trim the branch of an oak tree, and then recommenced his attack.

“He held his staff in both hands, and hacked at me like a woodcutter at a tree. My arms and wrists were beginning to fail me, when I called for a truce; for there was no honour to be gained from such a contest.

“‘I would fain hang thee on the nearest tree,’ he said furiously, throwing down his staff.

“I leapt back and blew my horn; the fellow was strong enough to send me into another world.

“Little John and the Merrie Men ran up at my call.

“I was seated beneath a tree, spent with fatigue, and, without saying a word,

I pointed out the reinforcement which had come to my assistance.

“‘What is it?’ asked John.

“‘My lad,’ I replied, ‘here is a Tinker wight who hath given me a sound drubbing, and I recommend him to you, for he is worthy of your consideration. My good man,’ I added, ‘an if you will join our band, you will be very welcome.’

“The Tinker accepted forthwith, and from that time, as you are aware, he hath been one of us.”

“I prefer a bow and arrows to all the cudgels in the world,” said William, “whether as a game or taken as weapons of offence and defence. It is better, in my opinion, at least to be sent out of the world by one single blow than to go piecemeal; and the wound of an arrow is a thousand times preferable to the pain caused by a blow from a cudgel.”

“My good friend,” returned Robin, “the cudgel renders very good service where the bow hath no power. The effect doth not depend on whether your quiver is empty or full, and when you do not desire the death of an enemy, a good beating will leave him a sharper remembrance than the wound of an arrow.”

The three friends were making their way to Nottingham as they conversed, and all at once they met a little girl dissolved in tears.

Robin hastened toward the weeping beauty.

“Why dost weep, my child?” he asked in a kindly tone.

The little girl broke into sobs.

“I want to see Robin Hood,” she answered, “and if you have any pity in your heart, Master, take me to him.”

“I am Robin Hood, my pretty child,” replied the young man, gently. “Have my men been wanting in respect to thy youth and innocence? Is thy mother ill? Dost come to ask my help? Speak, I am entirely at thy disposal.”

“Master, a great misfortune hath befallen us; three of my brothers, who belong to thy band, have been taken prisoners by the Sheriff of Nottingham.”

“Tell me the name of thy brothers, my child.”

“Adalbert, Edelbert, and Edwin the Merry-hearted,” sobbed the little girl.

An exclamation of dismay escaped Robin.

“Good companions,” said he, “these are the bravest and hardiest of all my

troop. How did they fall into the Sheriff's hands, my little friend?"

"In rescuing a young man who was being taken to prison for having defended his mother against the insults of some soldiers. At this very moment, Sir, they are getting ready the gallows at the gate of the town, doubtless to hang my brothers thereon."

"Dry thy tears, pretty child," answered Robin kindly. "Thy brothers have naught to fear; there is not a man in all Sherwood Forest but would not be ready to give his life for these three good fellows. We will go into Nottingham; return to thy home, console thy father's afflicted heart by thy sweet voice, and tell thy mother that Robin Hood will give her back her children."

"I will pray Heaven to bless thee, Master," murmured the little girl, smiling amid her tears. "I had heard that thou wert alway ready to help the unfortunate and protect the poor. But, I beseech thee, Master Robin, haste thee, for my dear brothers are in sore danger of their lives."

"Trust me, dear child; I will arrive at the most propitious time. Hurry back to Nottingham, and tell no one of what thou hast done."

The child took Robin Hood's hands and kissed them warmly.

"I shall pray for thy happiness all my life, Master," said she, in a voice full of emotion.

"God bless thee, my child! Good-bye."

The little maid ran off down the road to the town, and soon disappeared beneath the shade of the trees.

"Hurrah!" said Will. "We shall have something to do now. I shall be amused. What are your orders, Robin?"

"Go to Little John, tell him to assemble as many of the men as he can find, and lead them—of course without being seen—to the outskirts of the wood nearest to Nottingham. Then at sound of my horn you will cut your way through to me, word in hand and with bows bent."

"What do you purpose, then, to do?" asked Will.

"I shall go into the town and see whether there be any means whatever of delaying the execution. Forget not, friends, that you must act with extreme caution, for should the Reeve come to learn that I have been warned of the critical condition of my men, he would

take care to prevent any attempt at deliverance on my part, and would hang our comrades within the Castle. So much for the prisoners. As for you, you are well aware that his Lordship hath loudly boasted that if ever we fell into his hands, he would hang us upon the town gallows. The Sheriff hath conducted the affair of the Merry Hearts so swiftly that he cannot fear that I have been warned of the fate in store for them; consequently, in order to instil a wholesome lesson into the citizens of Nottingham, he will hang our companions publicly. I will make all speed to the town; do you rejoin your men, and follow my instructions to the letter."

As he said this, Robin hurried off. Hardly had he left his companions ere he met a pilgrim of the Mendicant Order.

"What news from the town, good Father?" asked Robin.

"The news from the town, young man," replied the pilgrim, "is full of woe and lamentation. Three of Robin Hood's companions are to be hanged by order of the Lord Fitz-Alwine."

A sudden idea crossed Robin's mind.

"Father," said he, "I should like to be present at the execution of these poachers, without being known for one of the Keepers of the Forest. Wilt exchange thy clothes for mine?"

"Art joking, young man?"

"Nay, father, I simply desire to give thee my costume and to put on thy robe. If thou dost accept my proposition, I will give thee forty shillings, to use according to thy fancy."

The old man looked curiously at the author of this strange request.

"Thy clothes are handsome," said he, "and my robe is ragged. It is not possible to believe thou shouldst wish to change thy brilliant garb for these wretched rags. He who makes fun of an old man commits a great sin; he mocks both God and misfortune."

"Father," replied Robin, "I respect thy white hairs, and I pray the Virgin to take thee under her Divine protection. I put my request with no ill intent in mine heart; 'tis necessary for the accomplishment of a good work. Hold," added he, offering the old man twenty pieces of money, "here is an earnest of our bargain."

The pilgrim looked covetously at the coins.

"Youth hath many foolish ideas," said



he, "and if thou art in a paroxysm of fantastic mirth, I see not why I should refuse to let thee have thy way."

"Now, that is well said," returned Robin, "and if thou wilt disrobe. . . Thy hose are fashioned by events," continued Robin, gaily, "for, to judge by the innumerable pieces of which they are composed, they have gathered to them the materials of the four seasons."

The pilgrim began to laugh.

"My robe is like a Norman's conscience," he said, "'tis made up of odds and ends, while thy doublet is the image of a Saxon heart, strong and without blemish."

"Thy speech is golden, Father," said Robin, donning the old man's rags as fast as he was able, "and if I must do homage to thy wit, 'tis likewise my duty to accord praise to the manifest scorn I inspire in thee, for thy robe is of quite a Christian simplicity."

"Am I to keep thy arms?" asked the pilgrim.

"Nay, Father, for I shall want them. Now that our mutual transformation is complete, allow me to give thee some advice. Get thee hence from this part of the Forest, and above all, in the interests of thine own safety, beware of attempting to follow me. Thou hast my clothes upon thy back, my money in thy pocket, thou art rich and well clothed, go seek thy fortune some leagues away from Nottingham."

"I thank thee for thy advice, good lad; it doth accord well with mine own wishes. Take the benediction of an old man, and if thine enterprise be honest, I wish it immediate success."

Robin saluted the pilgrim gracefully and made off with all haste in the direction of the town.

At the moment when Robin, thus disguised, and bearing no weapon save an oaken cudgel, arrived at Nottingham, a procession of mercenaries left the Castle, and took the road toward the end of the town, where three gallows had been set up.

Suddenly an unexpected piece of news went round the crowd; the hangman was ill, and, being on the point of death himself, was quite unable to launch another into eternity. By order of the Sheriff, a proclamation was made; and a man was called for who would consent to fulfil the office of hangman.

Robin, who had placed himself at the

head of the procession, advanced towards Baron Fitz-Alwine.

"Noble Lord," said he, in a snuffling voice, "what will you give me, an I consent to take the hangman's place?"

The Baron stepped back, as one who fears a dangerous contact.

"Methinketh," replied the noble Baron, looking Robin up and down, "that if I should offer thee a new assortment of clothing, thou shouldst be glad to accept such reward. Therefore, beggar, if thou wilt get us out of this difficulty, I will e'er give thee six new suits, and beside that the hangman's perquisite of thirteen pence."

"And what will you give me, my Lord if I hang you into the bargain?" asked Robin, approaching the Baron.

"Keep thy distance, beggar, and repeat what thou hast just said; I did not understand it."

"You offered me six new suits and thirteen pence," returned Robin, "for hanging these poor lads. I ask what you would add to my reward an if I engage to hang you and a dozen of your Norman dogs."

"Shameless ragamuffin! What is the meaning of thine insolence?" cried the Baron, astounded at the pilgrim's audacity. "Dost know whom thou art addressing? Impertinent knave, one word more and thou wilt make the fourth bird hanging on the gallows-tree."

"Have you remarked," quoth Robin, "that I am a poor man, very miserably clad?"

"Yea, in truth, very miserably clad," replied the Baron, making a face of disgust.

"Well," continued our hero, "thou outer misery hides within a large head and a right sensitive nature. I am very sensible to an insult, and resent disdain and injury at least as much as you do, noble Baron. You do not scruple to insult my misery."

"Hold thy tongue, thou beggar chatterbox. Dost dare compare thyself with me, the Lord Fitz-Alwine? Go thou art mad."

"I am a poor man," said Robin, "a very poor, miserable man."

"I did not come here to listen to thy prating of one of thy sort," returned the Baron, impatiently. "If thou dost refuse my offer, get you gone; if thou do accept it, prepare to fill thine office."

"I do not rightly know in what mine office consists," returned Robin, who was seeking to gain time for his men to reach the outskirts of the wood. "I have never acted as hangman, and I thank the Holy Virgin for it. Cursed be the infamous trade and the miserable wretch who doth practise it."

"How now? dost mock me?" roared the Baron, beside himself at Robin's insolence. "Hark thee, if thou dost not set about thy work at once, I will have thee soundly beaten."

"And would that help you on at all, my Lord?" returned Robin. "Would you the more readily find a man disposed to carry out your orders? No, you have just made a proclamation which all have heard, and yet I am the only man who hath offered to do your wishes."

"I know well enow what art driving at, base wretch," cried the Baron, overwhelmed with rage. "Thou wouldst have the sum promised thee for despatching these clowns into another world increased."

Robin shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them be hanged by whom you please," replied he, affecting complete indifference.

"Not at all, not at all," returned the Baron, in a milder voice; "thou shalt do the work. I will double the reward, and if thou dost not fill thine office exactly, I shall have the right to call thee the least conscientious hangman in the world."

"If I wished to put the unhappy creatures to death," replied Robin, "I should content myself with the reward you have already offered me, but I refuse point blank to soil my hands by contact with the gallows."

"What dost mean, wretch?" bellowed the Baron.

"Wait, my Lord; I will call for men who, at my command, will deliver you for ever from the sight of these terrible culprits."

As he finished speaking Robin blew a joyous flourish upon his hunting-horn, and laid his hands upon the terrified Baron.

"My Lord," said he, "your life hangs by a thread; if you make a movement, I plunge this knife into your heart. Forbid your servants to come to your assistance," Robin added, brandishing an immense hunting-knife over the old man's head.

"Soldiers, remain in your ranks!" cried the Baron, in a stentorian voice.

The sun glanced off the sparkling blade

of the knife, and the shining reflection dazzled the old lord, and made him appreciate his adversary's power; so, instead of attempting an impossible resistance, he submitted with groans.

"What dost desire of me?" he said, trying to put a conciliatory softness into his voice.

"The life of the three men whom you would hang, my Lord," replied Robin Hood.

"I cannot grant thee that boon, my good man," returned the old man; "the unhappy creatures have killed the King's deer, which misdemeanor is punishable by death. The whole town of Nottingham knows of their crime and their sentence, and if, from a culpable weakness I grant thy prayer, the King would be informed of a compliance so entirely inexcusable."

At that moment a great tumult was observed among the crowd, and the whistling of arrows was heard.

Robin, who knew his men were come, gave a shout.

"Ah, you are Robin Hood," groaned the Baron.

"Yea, my Lord," replied our hero, "I am Robin Hood."

Protected in a friendly manner by the inhabitants of the town, the Merrie Men now appeared from all directions, and Will Scarlett with his brave fellows soon joined their companions.

The prisoners once free, Baron Fitz-Alwine saw plainly that the only means of getting himself safe and sound out of such a critical situation was to conciliate Robin Hood.

"Take the prisoners away quickly," said he. "My soldiers, exasperated by the remembrance of a recent defeat, might put obstacles in the way of the success of your project."

"This act of courtesy was dictated to you by fear," retorted Robin Hood, laughingly. "I do not dread any violence from your soldiers; the number and valour of my men render them invulnerable."

Saying which, Robin Hood saluted the old man ironically, turned his back on him, and ordered his men to hie them back to the Forest.

The Baron's livid features expressed rage and fear. He called his men together, remounted his horse, and rode off in all haste.

The citizens of Nottingham, who



regarded poaching as hardly a blameworthy action, surrounded the Merrie Men, uttering shouts of joy. Then the chief men of the town, put at ease by the Baron's flight, testified their sympathy to Robin Hood, while the parents of the young prisoners embraced the knees of their sons' deliverer.

The humble and sincere thanks of these poor people appealed more to Robin Hood's heart than any lofty sentiments expressed in flowery rhetoric could have done.

## CHAPTER IX

A WHOLE year had slipped away since the day when Robin had so generously succoured Sir Richard of the Plain, and for some weeks past the Merrie Men had again taken up their abode in Barnsdale Forest. From the early morning of the day fixed for the Knight's visit Robin had been prepared to receive him, but the appointed hour did not bring the expected visitor.

"He will not come," said Will Scarlett, who, with Little John and Robin, was seated beneath a tree watching with some impatience the road which stretched before them.

"Sir Richard's ingratitude will give us a lesson," replied Robin. "It will teach us to put no trust in the promises of men; but for the sake of the human race I should not like to be deceived by Sir Richard, for I have never seen a man who bore in his countenance more visible imprints of loyalty and frankness; and I declare that if my debtor doth not keep his word, I shall no longer know by what external sign to know an honest man."

"I await the good Knight's coming with certainty," said Little John. "The sun is not yet hidden beyond the trees, and Sir Richard will be here before another hour hath passed."

"May God grant it, my dear John," replied Robin Hood, "for, like you, I would fain hope that the word of a Saxon is a pledge of honour. I will stay here until the first stars begin to peep out, and if the Knight come not, I shall mourn for him as for a friend. Take your arms, my lads, call Much, and patrol the road leading to St. Mary's Abbey. You may

meet with Sir Richard, or, in default of that ungrateful man, some rich Norman, or even some half-famished devil. I wish to see some unknown face; go, seek some adventure, and bring me any guest whatsoever."

"That indeed is a strange way of consoling yourself, my dear Robin," laughed Will, "but it shall be as you wish. We will go in search of some passing distraction."

The two young men called Much, and on his appearance they all set off together in the direction indicated by Robin.

"Robin is very gloomy to-day," said Will, thoughtfully.

"Why?" asked Much, in a tone of surprise.

"Because he fears he hath been deceived in trusting Sir Richard of the Plain," replied Little John.

"I do not see why it should cause Robin such sorrow; we do not need money, and four hundred crowns more or less in our treasure-chest . . ."

"Robin doth not think of the money," interrupted John, almost irritably. "You are talking very foolishly, cousin. Robin is wounded at having helped an ungrateful soul, that is all."

"Stop," said Will. "I hear horse approaching."

"I will go and meet the travellers," cried Much, running off.

"If it is the Knight, call us," said John.

William and his cousin waited, and soon Much re-appeared at the end of the path.

"It is not Sir Richard," said he, as he came up to his friends, "but two Dominicans accompanied by a dozen men."

"If these Dominicans have a cavalcade at their heels," said John, "you may be sure they are richly provided with gold; consequently they must be invited to partake of Robin's repast."

"Shall we call some of the Merrie Men?" asked Will.

"'Tis not needful; the cravens' hearts are in their legs and are so much the slaves of the latter that in the presence of danger their one thought is flight. Behold! here comes the monks. Remember we absolutely must take them to Robin; he is dull, and 'twill be a pleasant distraction for him. Get ready your bows, and be prepared to bar the way of this fine cavalcade."

William and Much hastened to carry out his orders.

On turning a corner of the road, which wound at will among the trees, the travellers perceived the Foresters and the hostile position they had taken up.

The servants, terrified at the dangerous encounter, reined in their steeds, and the Monks, who occupied the front rank of the little column, tried to hide themselves behind their men.

"Do not attempt to move," cried John, commandingly, "or I will surely kill you."

The Monks grew pale, but, finding themselves at the mercy of the Foresters, they obeyed the order so roughly given.

"Fair stranger," said one of the Monks, grinning most amiably, "what do you desire from a poor servant of Holy Church?"

"I desire that ye bestir yourselves. My master hath awaited you this three hours, and the dinner groweth cold."

The Dominicans exchanged uneasy looks.

"Your words are a riddle to us, my friend. Be so good as to explain yourself," replied one of them in honeyed tones.

"I will say it once again, and it needs no explanation—my master awaits you."

"Who is your master, my friend?"

"Robin Hood," replied Little John, shortly.

A shudder of fear passed like an icy blast over the men who accompanied the Monks. They glanced fearfully around them, expecting, no doubt, to see more outlaws burst from the thicket.

"Robin Hood," repeated the Monk, in a voice more harsh than musical. "I know of Robin Hood; he is a robber by profession, on whose head a price is set."

"Robin Hood is no robber," replied Little John, furiously, "and I do not counsel any one to echo the insolent accusation you bring against my noble master. But I have no time to discuss so delicate a point with you. Robin Hood invites you to dinner; follow me without demur! As for your servants, I warn them to show me their heels, an if they wish to save their lives. Will and Much, bring down the first man who attempts to remain here against my wishes."

The Foresters, who had lowered their bows during the conversation between the Monk and Little John, raised them

once more, and stood ready to discharge their arrows. Seeing the bows raised and turned against them, the Dominicans' men set spur to their steeds and saved themselves with a precipitation which spoke volumes for their prudence. The Monks were preparing to follow the example of their men when they were arrested by John, who constrained them to stop by seizing the bridles of their horses. Behind the Monks, John perceived a young groom who appeared to be in charge of a sumpter horse, and near the groom stood a boy, dressed as a page and dumb with fear.

More courageous than the men of the escort, the two youths had not deserted their posts.

"Keep an eye on those young rogues. I give them permission to follow their masters."

Robin had remained seated beneath the Trysting Tree, but when he saw John and his companions, he rose quickly, and, advancing to meet them, greeted the Monks with effusion.

"Never heed the insolent fellows, Robin," said John, irritated by the Monks' want of respect. "They are but ignorant fellows; they have never a kind word for the poor nor courtesy toward any one at all."

"No matter," replied Robin. "I know the Monks, and I expect from them neither good words nor gracious smiles; but I am a slave to politeness. Whom have you there, Will?" added Robin, looking at the two pages and the sumpter horse.

"The remainder of a troop consisting of a dozen men," replied the young man, with a laugh.

"What have you done with the main body of this valiant army?"

"Naught at all; the sight of our bent bows threw its ranks into confusion, and they fled without even turning their heads."

Robin began to laugh.

"But, worthy brothers," he continued, addressing the Monks, "you must be very hungry after so long a journey; will ye share my meal?"

The Dominicans regarded the Merrie Men, who had run up at the sound of the horn, with so terrified an expression that Robin said kindly to them, in order to calm their fears—

"Fear naught, good Monks; no harm



shall befall you. Seat yourselves at the table, and eat your fill."

The Monks obeyed, but it was easy to see that they were but little reassured by the young Chief's kind words.

"Where is your Abbey?" asked Robin; "and what name doth it bear?"

"I belong to the Abbey of St. Mary," said the elder of the Monks, "and I am the Grand Cellarer of the Monastery."

"Welcome, Brother Cellarer," said Robin. "I am happy to receive a man of your worth. You shall give me your opinion on my wine, for you must be an excellent judge in such matters; though I dare hope you will find it to your taste, for, being myself difficult to please, I always drink wine of the best quality."

The Monks took heart; they ate with a good appetite, and the Cellarer acknowledged the excellence of the dishes and the full body of the wine, adding that it was a real pleasure to dine upon the turf in such joyous company.

"My good brothers," said Robin Hood, toward the end of the meal, "ye appeared surprised at being asked to dinner by a man whom ye did not know. I will explain the mystery of the invitation in a few words. A year ago I lent a sum of money to a friend of your Prior, and accepted as a guarantee the Holy Mother of Jesus, our sainted patroness. My unshakeable confidence in the Holy Virgin led me to believe firmly that at the expiration of the appointed term I should receive in some manner the money I had lent. Whereupon I sent three of my men to seek for travellers; they saw you, and brought you hither. You belong to a Monastery, and I can guess the delicate mission confided to you by the provident and generous benevolence of our Holy Patroness; you are come to repay me in Her name the money lent to the poor man. Be ye welcome!"

"The debt of which you speak is quite unknown to me, Master," returned the Monk, "and I do not bring you any money."

"You are mistaken, Father; I feel certain that the chests carried by that horse led by your page contain the amount due to me. How many pieces of gold have you in that pretty little leathern trunk attached so securely to the poor beast?"

The Monk, thunderstruck by Robin

Hood's question, grew pale, and stammered out in an almost unintelligible voice—

"I have scarce anything, Master; at most but a score of gold pieces."

"Only twenty pieces of gold?" returned Robin, fixing a stern look upon the Monk.

"Yea, Master," replied the Monk, whose livid face became suddenly suffused with colour.

"If you are speaking the truth," said Robin, in a friendly tone, "I will not take one groat of your small fortune from you. Better still, I will give you as much money as you may need. But, on the other hand, if you have had the bad taste to lie to me, I will not leave you even a penny piece. Little John," continued Robin, "open the little trunk; if you find there but twenty pieces of gold, you may respect our guests' property, but if the sum is double or treble that amount, take it all."

Little John hastened to obey Robin's order. The colour faded from the Monk's cheeks; tears of rage coursed down his cheeks; he clasped his hands convulsively together, and a deep groan burst from him.

"Ho, ho!" said Robin, watching the Brother, "it appears that the twenty pieces of gold are in numerous company. Well, John," he asked, "is our guest as poor as he would fain make out?"

"I know not if he be poor," answered John; "but of one thing am I well assured, and that is that I have just found eight hundred gold pieces in the little trunk."

"Leave me the money, Master," said the Monk; "it is not mine, and I am responsible for it to my Father Superior."

"To whom bear you these eight hundred pieces of gold?" questioned Robin.

"To the Inspectors of St. Mary's Abbey, from our Abbot."

"The Inspectors abuse the generosity of your Prior, Brother, and it ill becomes them to repay themselves so heavily for a few words of indulgence. This time they shall have nothing, and you will tell them that Robin Hood, having need of money hath carried off the sum they expected."

"There is yet another chest," said John; "shall I open it?"

"Nay," replied Robin; "I will content myself with eight hundred pieces of gold. Sir Monk, you are free to continue your journey. You have been treated with

courtesy, and I hope I see you depart satisfied on all points."

"I do not consider a forcible invitation and an open theft very courteous," said the Monk, superciliously. "Here am I obliged to return to the Monastery, and what can I say to the Prior?"

"You will greet him from me," laughed Robin Hood. "He knows me, the worthy Father, and he will be very sensible of this token of good friendship."

The Monks mounted their horses, and, with hearts bursting with rage, galloped off along the road leading to the Abbey.

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" cried Little John; "she hath returned to us the money you lent Sir Richard, and if the latter have broken his word, we can still console ourselves in that we have lost nothing."

"I cannot so easily console myself in having lost confidence in the word of a Saxon," replied Robin, "and I should have preferred a visit from Sir Richard, poor and despoiled of everything, rather than be convinced that he is ungrateful and without honour."

"Noble Master," suddenly called a voice from the glade, "a Knight appeareth on the high-road, accompanied by an hundred men, all armed to the teeth. Shall we prepare to bar their way?"

"Are they Normans?" asked Robin, quickly.

"One seldom sees Saxons so richly clothed as these travellers," answered the lad who had announced the approach of the troop.

"Look alive, then, my Merrie Men," cried Robin. "To your bows and lurking-places. Get ready your arrows, but draw not ere you receive my order to attack."

The men disappeared, and the cross-road where Robin remained soon appeared completely deserted.

"You come not with us?" John asked Robin, who sat motionless at the foot of a tree.

"Nay," rejoined the young man; "I will await the strangers, and find out with whom we have to deal."

"Then I remain with you," said Little John; "to be alone might prove dangerous for you, an arrow is so quickly sped. If they strike you, I am at least here to defend you."

"I, too, will remain as body-guard," said Will, seating himself beside Robin,

who had stretched himself carelessly on the grass.

The unexpected arrival of a body of men so formidable in proportion to the number of the Foresters, who were mostly scattered all about the wood, disquieted Robin slightly, and he did not wish to commence hostilities before being assured of victory.

The horsemen advanced rapidly along the glade. When they were an arrow's flight from where Robin lay, the man who seemed to be their chief cantered up to encounter Robin.

"It is Sir Richard," cried John gaily, as he looked at the approaching horseman.

"Holy Mother, I praise thee!" said Robin, springing to his feet. "A Saxon hath not broken his word."

Sir Richard leapt from his horse, ran toward Robin, and threw himself into his arms.

"God keep thee, Robin Hood," said he, giving the young man a fatherly embrace. "God keep thee in health and happiness to thy last day!"

"Be welcome to the green wood, gentle Knight," replied Robin, with emotion. "I am happy to see thee true to thy promise, and with a heart full of kindness to thy devoted servant."

"I should have come empty-handed even, Robin Hood, to have the honour of wringing thy hand; but, luckily for mine own satisfaction, I can return the money thou didst lend me with so much grace, kindness, and courtesy."

"Hast, then, recovered entirely the possession of thy property?" asked Robin Hood.

"Yea, and may God prosper thee in proportion to the happiness which I owe to thee."

Robin's attention was next attracted by the men, magnificently clad in the fashion of the day, who formed a glittering line behind Sir Richard.

"Doth this fine troop belong to thee?" asked the young man.

"It doth at present," answered the Knight, with a smile.

"I admire the bearing of the men and their martial figures," continued Robin, in a tone of some surprise; "they seem to be perfectly disciplined."

"Yea, they are brave and faithful, and all of Saxon origin, and their temper loyal—for I have proved all the qualities



which I have described to thee. Thou wouldst do me a good service, dear Robin, if thou wouldst instruct thy men to entertain my companions; they have made a long journey, and will require some hours of repose."

"They shall learn the meaning of forest hospitality," replied Robin, heartily. "My Merrie Men," continued he to his band, who began to appear on all sides, "these strangers are brother Saxons, they are hungry and thirsty; I pray you show them how we treat the friends who visit us in the green wood."

The Foresters obeyed Robin's orders with a promptitude which should have satisfied Sir Richard, for before retiring with his host he beheld the turf covered with viands, pots of ale and bottles of good wine.

Robin Hood, Sir Richard, Little John, and Will sat down to a succulent repast, and when dessert was brought, the Knight began the following account of the events which had befallen him since his first encounter with our hero.

"I cannot depict to you, my good friends, with what sentiments of gratitude and infinite joy I quitted the Forest a year ago to-day. My heart leapt within me, and I was in so great a haste to see my wife and children once more, that I regained the Castle in less time than it would take to tell you all my story.

"'We are saved,' I cried, straining my beloved ones to my heart. My wife dissolved in tears, and almost fainted.

"'Who is the generous friend who hath come to our aid?' asked Herbert.

"'My children,' I replied, 'I knocked in vain at every door; in vain I implored the succour of those who called themselves my friends; and I received no pity save from one man to whom I was unknown. This benevolent man is a noble Outlaw, the protector of the poor, the support of the wretched, the avenger of the oppressed, and his name is Robin Hood.'

"My children knelt around their mother, and piously rendered to God the sincere thanks of a profound gratitude. This duty accomplished, Herbert entreated me to allow him to pay thee a visit, but I pointed out to him that such a step would give thee more pain than pleasure, since thou dost not love to hear thy good deeds spoken of,"

"My dear Knight," interrupted Robin, "let us put aside this part of thy story, and tell us how thou didst arrange thy business with the Abbot of St. Mary's."

"Patience, good host, patience," said Sir Richard, with a smile. "I do not wish to praise thee. Be not afraid; I know thy admirable modesty on that point. Nevertheless, I must tell thee that sweet Lilas joined her prayers to Herbert's, and I was obliged to exert all my paternal authority to calm the impatience of their young hearts. I promised my children in your name, however, that they should have the happiness of seeing you at the Castle."

"Thou didst well, Sir Richard, and I promise thee that some day I will seek thy hospitality," said Robin, with emotion.

"Thank thee, good host; I will inform Herbert and Lilas of the engagement thou hast just made, and the hope of thanking thee in person will give them great satisfaction."

"On the morrow of my return," continued Sir Richard, "I presented myself at St. Mary's Abbey. I learnt later that at the very moment that I was making my way towards the Abbey, the Abbot and the Prior were together in the refectory and speaking of me in these terms—

"'It is a year to-day,' said the Abbot to the Prior, 'since a Knight whose domains adjoin the Monastery, borrowed from me four hundred pieces of gold; he was to repay me the money with interest, or leave me the free disposal of all his property. According to me, the time is up at mid-day, therefore I consider the moment for payment hath arrived, and I consider myself absolute master of all his hereditaments.'

"'Brother,' returned the Prior, indignantly, 'you are cruel; a poor man with a debt to discharge should in all justice have a final delay of four and twenty hours. It would be shameful of you to lay claim to property on which you had no rights. In acting thus you would ruin an unfortunate creature and reduce him to great misery, while as a member of Holy Church it is your duty to relieve as much as possible the burden which doth weigh upon our unfortunate fellow-creatures.'

"'Keep your counsels for those who need them,' replied the Abbot, angrily. 'I will do what meseemeth good without heeding your hypocritical reflections.'

"At this moment the Chief Cellarer entered the refectory.

"Have you any news of Sir Richard of the Plain?' the Abbot asked of him.

"Nay. But that matters not. All I know is that his property is now yours, Sir Abbot."

"The Chief Judge is here,' continued the Abbot; 'I will ask him whether I may now claim Sir Richard's Castle.'

"The Abbot went to find the Judge, and the latter, for due consideration received, replied to the Monk—

"Sir Richard will not come to-day, therefore you may consider yourself entitled to all his estates."

"This iniquitous judgment had just been given when I presented myself at the gate of the Monastery.

"In order to prove the generosity of my creditor, I had arrayed myself in mean garments, while the men who accompanied me were also very poorly accoutred.

"The porter of the Abbey came to meet me. I had been kind to him in the time of my prosperity, and the poor man had not forgotten it. He told me of the conversation which had taken place between the Abbot and the Prior. I was not surprised; I knew well that I had no reason to expect any grace from the holy man.

"Be welcome,' continued the Monk; 'your arrival well be a very agreeable surprise to the Prior. My Lord Abbot will doubtless be less satisfied, for already he looketh upon himself as owner of your estates. You will find a large company in the Great Hall, several lords and gentlemen. I hope, Sir Richard, that you will put no confidence in the honeyed words of our Father Superior, and that you have brought the money,' added the porter, in tones of affectionate solicitude.

"I reassured the good Monk, and proceeded alone to the Great Hall, where the whole of the Community was assembled in solemn conclave, to make arrangements for informing me of the sequestration of my property.

"The exalted assembly was so disagreeably surprised at my appearance that I might well have been some phantom come from another world on purpose to snatch from their grasp some ardently coveted prey.

"I humbly saluted the honourable

company and, with an air of false humility, I said to the Abbot—

"You see, Sir Abbot, I have kept my promise and have come back."

"Have you brought the money?' demanded the holy man, sharply.

"Alas! not one penny. . . ."

"A pleased smile hovered on the lips of my generous creditor.

"Then what doest thou here, an thou art not prepared to discharge thy debt?"

"I am come to entreat you to give me yet a few days longer."

"It is impossible; according to our agreement, thou must pay this very day. If thou canst not do it, thine estates belong to me; besides which, the Judge hath so decided. Is that not true, my Lord?"

"It is,' replied the Judge. 'Sir Richard,' he continued, throwing a contemptuous look at me, 'the lands of your ancestors are the property of our worthy Abbot.'

"I feigned a great despair and entreated the Abbot to have compassion upon me, to grant me three days longer. I depicted to him the miserable fate in store for my wife and children, as they were turned out of their home. The Abbot was deaf to my entreaties, he wearied of my presence, and imperiously commanded me to quit the Hall.

"Exasperated by this unmerited treatment, I held up my head proudly, and advancing to the middle of the great room, I laid upon the table a bag full of money.

"Here are the four hundred pieces of gold you lent me. The dial doth not as yet show the hour of noon; I have therefore fulfilled all the conditions of our agreement, and, despite your subterfuges, my estates will not change owners."

"You cannot conceive, Robin," added the Knight, laughing, "the Abbot's stupefaction, rage, and fury. He rolled his head from side to side and glared around him, muttering incoherently, and looking like a madman.

"After enjoying the spectacle of his dumb fury for a few seconds, I left the Hall and regained the Porter's lodge. There I arrayed myself in more suitable garments; my men also changed their clothes, and, accompanied by an escort worthy of my rank, I re-entered the Hall.

"The change in my outer appearance seemed to strike the company with astonishment; deliberately I advanced to the Judge's chair.



"'I address myself to you, my Lord,' I said, in a loud firm voice, 'to ask in the presence of this honourable company whether, having fulfilled all the conditions of my bond, the lands and Castle of the Plain are not mine?'"

"'They are yours,' replied the Judge, reluctantly.

"I acknowledged the justice of this decision and left the Monastery with a light heart.

"On the way home, I met my wife and children.

"'Rejoice, my dear ones,' I said, as I embraced them, 'and pray for Robin Hood; for without him we should be beggars. And now let us try to show generous Robin Hood that we are not insensible of the service he hath rendered us.'

"We set to work the very next day, and my estates, with proper cultivation, soon realised the value of thy loan. I bring thee five hundred pieces of gold, my good Robin, one hundred bows of the finest yew, with quivers and arrows, and besides that, I make thee a present of the troop of men whose fine appearance thou didst but now admire. The men are well armed and each one hath a good horse to ride. Accept them as followers, they will serve thee with gratitude and fidelity."

"I should hurt mine own self-esteem an I were to accept so rich a gift, my dear Knight," replied Robin with emotion. "Nor can I take the money which thou dost bring. The Chief Cellarer of St. Mary's Abbey broke his fast with me this morning and his expenses here have put eight hundred pieces of gold into our coffers. I do not take money twice in one day; I have taken the Monk's gold in place of thine, and thou art out of my debt. I know, my dear Knight, that the revenues of thy property have been impoverished by the King's exactions, and they must be carefully managed. Think of thy children. I am rich; the Normans crowd into these parts with their pockets full of money. Never speak of service or gratitude betwixt us, unless I can be useful in furthering the fortunes or the happiness of those whom thou dost love."

"Thou dost treat me in so noble and generous a manner," replied Sir Richard, greatly moved, "that I feel I should be indiscreet to force upon thee a gift which thou dost refuse."

"Yea, Sir Knight, let us speak no more of it," said Robin gaily. "But tell me how it is thou didst come so late to keep thine assignation."

"On my way hither," replied Sir Richard, "I passed through a village where all the best yeomen of the West Country were gathered together, occupied in trying feats of strength against one another. The prizes destined for the victor were a white bull, a horse, a saddle and bridle studded with gold nails, a pair of gauntlets, a silver ring, and a cask of old wine. I stopped awhile to watch the sport. A yeoman of ordinary size gave such proofs of strength that it was evident the prizes would be his, and, indeed, having felled all his adversaries, he remained master of the field. They were about to give him the objects he had earned so well, when he was recognised as one of thy band."

"Was he in truth one of my men?" asked Robin, quickly.

"Yea, they called him Jasper the Tinker."

"Then he gained the prizes, brave Jasper?"

"He gained them all; but under pretext of his being one of the band of Merrie Men, they disputed his right to them. Jasper defended his cause valiantly. And then two or three of the other combatants set to calling thee evil names. Thou shouldst have seen the vigour of lungs and muscles with which Jasper defended thee; he spake so loud and gesticulated so wildly that knives were drawn, and thy poor Jasper would have been vanquished by the number or treachery of his enemies, when, aided by my men, I put them all to flight. This small service rendered to the brave lad, I gave him five pieces of gold to drink with, and I invited the fugitives to make acquaintance with the cask of wine. As you may imagine, they did not refuse; and I brought Jasper away in order to save him from their future vengeance."

"I thank thee for having saved one of my brave fellows, my dear Knight," said Robin. "He who lends his support to my companions hath an endless claim upon my friendship. An ever thou have need of me, ask me what thou wilt; my arm and purse are ever at thy disposal."

"I shall always look upon thee as a true friend, Robin," answered the Knight;

"and I hope that thou wilt treat me in the same spirit."

The remaining hours of the afternoon wore merrily away, and toward evening Sir Richard accompanied Robin, Will, and Little John to Barnsdale Hall, where all the members of the Gamwell family were again assembled.

Sir Richard could hardly refrain from smiling as he admired the ten charming women who were presented to him. After having directed the Knight's attention to his beloved Maude, Will took his guest aside and asked him in a whisper if he had ever seen so ravishing a face as Maude's.

The Knight smiled, and whispered to Will that he would be lacking in gallantry toward the other ladies, if he permitted himself to say aloud what he thought of the adorable Maude.

William, enchanted by this gracious reply, went over to his wife and kissed her with the firm conviction that he was the most favoured of husbands and the happiest of men.

When night fell, Sir Richard left Barnsdale, and, escorted by some of Robin's men, who were to guide him through the Forest, he soon regained the Castle of the Plain with his numerous following.

## CHAPTER X

THE Sheriff of Nottingham (we are now speaking of Lord Fitz-Alwine of happy memory) having learnt that Robin Hood and a portion of his band were in Yorkshire, thought it would be possible, with a strong troop of his own brave men-at-arms, to clear Sherwood Forest of these outlaws, who, separated from their chief, would find it impossible to defend themselves. In planning this clever expedition, Lord Fitz-Alwine resolved to watch the approaches to the Forest in order to catch Robin as he returned. We know that the Baron's mercenaries were not very courageous, but he likewise sent to London for a troop of ruffians and trained them himself for the pursuit of the Outlaws.

The Merrie Men had so many friends in Nottingham that they were warned of the fate in store for them and the Baron's kind intentions, even before he himself

had fixed the day on which the bloody battle was to take place.

This gave the Foresters time to put themselves on the defensive, and to prepare to receive the Sheriff's troops.

Attracted by the hope of a rich reward, the Baron's men marched to the attack with every appearance of indomitable courage. But no sooner had they entered the wood, than they were met by such a terrible volley of arrows that the ground was strewn with the corpses of half their number.

A second volley, more vigorous and more murderous still, followed the first; each arrow found its mark while the bowmen remained invisible.

Having thus filled the ranks of the enemy with fear and confusion, the Foresters broke from their hiding-places, shouting loudly and overthrowing all who tried to resist them. A terrible panic spread among the Baron's troop, and in indescribable confusion they regained Nottingham Castle.

Not one of the Merrie Men was wounded in this strange encounter, and in the evening, recovered from their fatigue, as fresh and vigorous as they had been before the combat, they collected upon litters the bodies of the soldiers who had been killed, and deposited them at the Outer Gate of Lord Fitz-Alwine's Castle.

Desperate and furious, the Baron passed the night in cursing his luck. He accused his men; he said that his patron saint had deserted him; he laid the blame of the non-success of his arms on everybody, and proclaimed himself a valiant leader, but the victim of the faintheartedness of his subordinates.

On the evening of the following day, one of Lord Fitz-Alwine's Norman friends came to visit him, accompanied by fifty men-at-arms. The Baron told him of his misadventure, adding, doubtless to excuse his perpetual defeats, that Robin Hood's band was ever and always invisible.

"My dear Baron," quietly replied Sir Guy Gisborne (such was the visitor's name), "if Robin Hood were the devil in person and I took it into my head to tear out his horns, I should tear them out."

"Words are not deeds, my friend," answered the old man sharply; "and it is very easy to say, 'I could do that, an I



would,' but I defy you to catch Robin Hood."

"An it pleased me to take him," said the Norman, carelessly, "there would be no need to excite myself. I feel strong enough to tame a lion, and, after all, Robin Hood is only a man; a clever man, I admit, but not a diabolical or unassailable being."

"You may say what you please, Sir Guy," declared the Baron, evidently bent on persuading the Norman to make an attempt against Robin Hood, "but there is not a man in England, be he peasant, soldier, or great Lord, could make this heroic Outlaw bow down before him. He believes in naught, he fears naught, and a whole army would not intimidate him."

Sir Guy smiled disdainfully.

"I do not doubt the bravery of your fine Outlaw in the very least," said he; "but you must own, Baron, that up to the present Robin Hood hath fought only phantoms."

"What!" cried the Baron, cruelly wounded in his self-esteem as commander-in-chief.

"Yea, phantoms; I repeat it, my friend. Your soldiers are made, not of flesh and bones, but of mud and milk. Who ever saw such fools? They fly before the Outlaws' arrows, and the name alone of Robin Hood sets them a-shuddering. Oh! if I were but in your place!"

"What would you do?" asked the Baron, eagerly.

"I would hang Robin Hood."

"My good intentions in that respect are not lacking," replied the Baron, sombrely.

"So I perceive, Baron. It is the power that is lacking. Well, it is lucky for your enemy that he hath never found himself face to face with me."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Baron, "you would put your spear through his body, would you not? You amuse me very much, my friend, with all your bragging. Let be, you would tremble from head to foot, if I were only to say, 'There is Robin Hood.'"

The Norman bounded up.

"Know well," said he, furiously, "that I have no fear of either man or devil or of anything in the world, and I challenge you to test my courage. Since the name of Robin Hood was the starting-point of our conversation, I ask you, as a favour,

to put me on the track of this man whom you are pleased to consider invincible, only because you are unable to vanquish him. I undertake to seize him, crop his ears, and hang him up by the feet, with no more compunction than if he were a hog. Where is this mighty man to be met with?"

"In Barnsdale Forest."

"How far is the Forest from Nottingham?"

"Two days' journey would take us there by unfrequented ways; and as I should be grieved, my dear Sir Guy, if you were to come to any harm through me, if you will permit it, I will join my men to yours, and together we will go seek the rascal. I have learnt from a trustworthy source, that, at this moment, he is separated from the greater part of his men; it would therefore be easy, if we act with prudence, to surround the robbers' den, carry off their Chief, and deliver his band over to the vengeance of our soldiers. Mine have suffered greatly in Sherwood Forest, and they would be overjoyed to take a fierce and savage revenge."

"I am right glad to accept your offer, my good friend," replied the Norman; "for it will give me the satisfaction of proving to you that Robin Hood is neither a devil nor invincible. And, not only to equalise the struggle between the Outlaw and myself, but likewise to show you that I do not intend to act in any underhand manner, I will don a yeoman's costume and fight hand to hand with Robin Hood."

The Baron concealed the pleasure which his guest's vainglorious reply gave him, and in a fearful and solicitous tone, hazarded some timid remarks on the danger his excellent friend would run, and on the imprudence of a disguise which would put him in direct contact with a man renowned for his strength and skill.

The Norman, bursting with vanity and self-confidence, cut short the Baron's false-hearted objections; and the latter hastened with a briskness quite remarkable in one of his age to make ready his men-at-arms.

An hour later, Sir Guy Gisborne and Lord Fitz-Alwine, accompanied by a hundred men, and with the air of conquerors, took the cross-road that would lead them to Barnsdale Forest.

It had been arranged between the Baron and his new ally that he should direct his troop toward that part of the wood agreed upon beforehand, while, guarding against any appearance of sinister motive by his yeoman's garb, Sir Guy would take another direction, seek out Robin Hood, and fight him whether or no, and would, of course, slay him. The success of the Norman (we might add that he did not in the least doubt his own success) would be announced to the Baron by a peculiar blast upon a hunting-horn. At this triumphant call, the Baron would proclaim the Norman's victory, and gallop up to the field of battle. The victory verified by the sight of Robin's corpse, the soldiers would search the thickets and copses and underground retreats, to kill or take prisoner (the choice was graciously left to them) any Outlaws unlucky enough to fall into their hands.

Whilst the troop were making their way secretly to Barnsdale Forest, Robin Hood was stretched carelessly beneath the thick foliage of the Trysting Tree, fast asleep.

Little John was seated at his leader's feet, thinking the while of his charming wife and his sweet Winifred's many good qualities of heart and mind, when his tender dream was disturbed by the shrill cry of a thrush, which, perched on one of the lower branches of the Trysting Tree, sang out loud and shrill.

This strident warbling woke Robin abruptly, and he leapt up with a gesture of fear.

"Why, Robin," said Little John, "what is it?"

"Naught," replied the young man, composing himself again. "I had a dream, and I know not whether I should say it, but I was frightened. Methought I was attacked by two yeoman; they beat me unmercifully, and I returned their blows with an equal generosity. However, I was almost vanquished, death stood beside me, when a bird which came I know not whence, sang to me, 'Take courage, I will send thee help.' I am awake, and I see neither the bird nor the danger. But then dreams do not come true," added Robin, smiling.

"I am not of your opinion, Captain," said John, seriously, "for part of your dream was true. A moment ago, upon the branch which you are touching, a

thrush was singing with all its might. Your awakening put it to flight. Perhaps it came to warn you."

"Are you getting superstitious, friend John?" asked Robin, pleasantly. "Come, come, at your age 'twould be ridiculous; such childishness is for young girls and boys, not for us. However," he continued, "perchance 'tis wise, in an existence so adventurous as ours, to pay attention to every occurrence. Who knows? Perhaps the thrush said, 'Sentinels, beware!' and we are the sentinels of a troop of brave men. Forward, then; forewarned is forearmed."

Robin wound his horn, and the Merrie Men, dispersed through the wood, ran up in answer to his call.

Robin sent them down the road to York, for on that side alone was an attack to be feared, and, accompanied by John, he went to search the opposite side of the wood, William and two stout Foresters taking the road to Mansfield.

After searching the paths and roads toward which they had bent their steps, Robin and John made their way down the road followed by Will Scarlett. There, in a vale, they met a yeoman with his body wrapped in the skin of a horse, which served him for cloak. At that epoch, this strange garment was in great favour among the Yorkshire yeomen, the greater number of whom were engaged in horse breeding.

The newcomer wore at his side a sword and dirk, and his face, with its cruel expression, told plainly enough of the murderous uses to which his weapons were wont to be put.

"Ha, ha!" cried Robin, as he perceived him, "upon my soul, here comes a very ruffian. Crime oozes from him. I will question him; but an if he do not answer like an honest man, I will see the colour of his blood."

"He hath the appearance of a mastiff with good teeth, Robin. Beware; do you remain beneath this tree, while I ask his name, surname, and qualities."

"My dear John," replied Robin, quickly, "I have taken a fancy to that rascal. Let me tan his hide in mine own way. It is a long time since I was beaten, and, by the Holy Mother, my good protectress, I should never exchange a blow with any one if I listened to your prudent advice. Take care, friend John," added Robin, in an affectionate tone, "there will



come a time when in default of an adversary, I shall be obliged to beat thee unmercifully; oh! only to keep my hand in, but thou wilt be none the less the victim of thy benevolent generosity. Go and rejoin Will, and do not return to me until thou hearest the sound of a triumphant blast."

"Your will is my law, Robin Hood," answered John, in an offended voice, "and it is my duty to obey, however unwillingly."

We will leave Robin on his way to meet the stranger, and we will follow Little John, who, faithful slave to his Chief's commands, hastened after William, who had started with two men on the high-road to Mansfield.

About three hundred yards from the spot where Little John left Robin alone with the yeoman, he found Will Scarlett with his two companions, occupied in exercising all their strength against a dozen soldiers. John gave a shout, and with a bound placed himself beside his friends. But the danger, already so great, became even more so as the clash of arms and the sound of horses' hoofs attracted the young man's attention to the extremity of the road.

At the end of the road, and in the half-shadow cast by the trees, appeared a company of soldiers, and at their head trotted a richly caparisoned horse.

John sprang forward to meet the newcomers, bent his bow, and took aim at the Baron. The movements of the young man followed each other with such rapidity and violence that his too tightly stretched bow broke like a thread of glass.

John uttered a curse upon his inoffensive arrow, seized a new bow handed to him by an outlaw, who had been mortally wounded by the soldiers fighting with William.

The Baron understood the archer's actions and intentions; he bent down low upon his horse until he appeared to be one with the animal, and the arrow destined for him sent a man behind him rolling in the dust.

His fall maddened the whole troop, who, determined to carry off the victory, and finding themselves in the majority, spurred their horses and advanced rapidly.

One of William's comrades was dead, the other was still fighting, but it was easy to perceive that he could not last

long. John saw the danger to which his cousin was exposed, and falling upon the group of combatants, he snatched Will from their grasp, urging him to fly.

"Never," cried Will, firmly.

"For pity's sake, Will," said John, continuing to hit out at his aggressors, "go seek Robin and call the Merrie Men. Alas, rivers of blood will flow this day; the song of the thrush was a heaven-sent warning."

William went at his cousin's request; it was easy to understand its import considering the number of soldiers who now appeared in the glade. He dealt a terrific blow at a man who attempted to bar his way, and disappeared in the thicket.

Little John fought like a lion, but it was madness to try and fight so many enemies single handed; he was vanquished and fell, and the soldiers, after binding him hand and foot, tied him to a tree. The Baron's arrival was to decide the fate of our poor friend.

Lord Fitz-Alwine hastened up, attracted by the shouts of the soldiers. At sight of the prisoner, a smile of gratified hate lent a ferocious expression to the Baron's features.

"Ha! ha!" said he, relishing with unspeakable joy the triumph of his victory, "I have you in my hands then, great maypole of the Forest. You shall pay dearly for your insolence, ere I despatch you into another world."

"By my faith," said John, in a flippant tone, biting his lip furiously the while, "whatever tortures it may please you to inflict upon me, they could not make you forget that I have held your life in my hands, and that if you still have the power to martyrize the Saxons, it is to my goodness that you owe it. But beware! Robin Hood is coming, and you will not have the easy victory over him that you have had over me."

"Robin Hood," sneered the Baron. "Robin Hood's last hour will soon arrive. I have ordered his head to be cut off and his body to be left here as food for man-eating wolves. Soldiers," he added, turning to two men, the vile slaves of his wishes, "place this villain upon a horse and let us remain on this spot to await the return of Sir Guy, who will, I presume, bring us Robin Hood's head."

The men who had dismounted stood ready to leap into the saddle, and the Baron, seated comfortably upon a grassy

hillock, waited patiently for Sir Guy Gisborne's bugle call.

Let us leave his lordship to recover from his fatigue, and see what has been passing between Robin Hood and the man in the horse-skin cloak.

"Good morrow, fair Sir," said Robin, approaching the stranger. "One might think, judging by the excellent bow you carry, that you were a brave and honest archer."

"I have lost my way," replied the traveller, disdaining to reply to the interrogatory supposition addressed to him, "and I fear much to stray in this labyrinth of cross-roads, glades, and paths."

"To me all the forest paths are well known, Master," replied Robin, politely, "and if you will tell me to what part of the wood you wish to make your way, I will be your guide."

"I am not making my way to any particular spot," answered the stranger, examining his interlocutor attentively. "I wish to get near the middle of the wood, for I hope to meet there a man with whom I would fain converse."

"This man is doubtless some friend of yours?" asked Robin, amiably.

"Nay," returned the stranger, quickly; "he is a villain of the deepest dye, an Outlaw who doth well deserve the noose."

"Oh! indeed," said Robin, still smiling. "And may one inquire without indiscretion, the name of this scapegrace?"

"Certainly; he is called Robin Hood. And hark ye, young man, I would gladly give ten pieces of gold to have the pleasure of meeting him."

"My good Sir," said Robin, "congratulate yourself upon the luck which hath placed you in my way, for I can conduct you into the presence of Robin Hood without putting your generosity to the proof. Only suffer me to ask your name."

"I am called Sir Guy Gisborne. I am rich and own many vassals. My costume, as you may well imagine, is but a clever disguise. Robin Hood, not being on his guard against a poor devil so wretchedly attired, will let me come right up to him. So the question is simply how to find him. Once within reach of my hand he will die, I swear it, without having either the time or chance to defend himself; I will slay him without ruth or pity."

"Robin Hood hath done you much evil then?"

"Me? I did not know him even by name until a few hours ago; and, as you will see if you will take me to him, my face is quite unknown to him."

"For what reason, then, would you take his life?"

"For no reason at all, simply because it is my pleasure."

"A singular pleasure, if you will pardon me for saying so; and moreover, I pity you greatly for having such bloodthirsty ideas."

"Well, you are wrong. I am not really ill-natured, and had it not been for that fool Fitz-Alwine, I should be at this moment wending my way quietly homeward. It was he who induced me to make the attempt, by defying me to vanquish Robin Hood. My self-esteem is involved, therefore I must bear off the victory at any price. But, by the way," added Sir Guy, "now that I have told you my name, estate, and projects, you must answer me in your turn. Who are you?"

"Who am I?" repeated Robin, with loud voice and serious look. "I am the Earl of Huntingdon, the King of the Forest; I am the man you seek, I am Robin Hood!"

The Norman leapt back.

"Then prepare to die," he cried, drawing his sword. "Sir Guy Gisborne hath but one word; he hath sworn to kill thee, thou shalt die! To thy prayers, Robin Hood, for in a few minutes the call of my hunting-horn will announce to my companions, who are near at hand, that the Outlaw Chief is only a headless, shapeless corpse."

"To the vanquisher shall be reserved the right of disposing of the body of his adversary," replied Robin Hood, coldly. "Look to thyself! Thou hast sworn to spare me not; I swear on my side that if the Holy Virgin grant me the victory, I will treat thee as thou dost deserve. Come then, no quarter for either; 'tis a matter of life and death."

And with that, the two opponents crossed swords.

The Norman was not only a perfect Hercules, but also a past master in the art of fencing. He attacked Robin with such fury that the young man, hard pressed, was forced to step back, and caught his foot in the roots of an oak tree. Sir Guy, whose eye was as quick as his hand was strong, at once perceived



his advantage; he redoubled his blows, and several times Robin felt his sword turn in the nervous grasp of his hand. His position was becoming critical; his movements fettered by the gnarled roots of the tree, which bruised his ankles, he could neither advance nor retire; he therefore determined to leap beyond the circle in which he was enclosed, and with a spring like that of a stag at bay, he leapt to the opposite side of the path, but in jumping he caught his foot in a low branch which sent him rolling in the dust. Sir Guy was not the man to miss such an opportunity for revenge; he uttered a triumphant cry, and threw himself on Robin with every intention of splitting open his head.

Robin saw his danger, and closing his eyes, he murmured fervently,—

“Holy Mother of God, help me! Dear Lady of Succour, wilt thou leave me to die by the hand of this miserable Norman?”

Hardly had Robin pronounced these words, which Sir Guy did not dare to interrupt (taking them no doubt for an act of contrition), than he felt a new force in all his limbs. He turned the point of his sword towards his enemy, and, as the latter sought to turn aside the menacing weapon, Robin leapt to his feet and stood up strong and free in the middle of the road. The combat, suspended for a moment, began again with renewed vigour; but the victory had changed sides and was now with Robin. Sir Guy, disarmed and struck full in the breast, fell dead without even a cry. After thanking God for the success of his arms, Robin assured himself that Sir Guy had really breathed his last; and, as he looked upon the Norman, Robin remembered that this man had not come alone to seek him, but had brought with him a troop of companions, who were now hidden somewhere in the wood, awaiting the call of his hunting-horn.

“I think it would be wise,” thought Robin, “to find out whether these brave fellows are not Baron Fitz-Alwine’s soldiers, and see for myself the pleasure which the news of my death will give him. I will dress myself in Sir Guy’s clothes, cut off his head, and call hither his waiting companions.”

Robin Hood stripped the Norman’s body of the chief parts of his costume, put them on, not without a feeling of

disgust, and when he had thrown the horse’s skin over his shoulders, he resembled Sir Guy Gisborne nearly enough to be mistaken for him.

The disguise accomplished, and the Norman’s head made unrecognisable at a first glance, Robin Hood sounded the horn.

A hurrah of triumph answered the young man’s call, and he rushed toward the spot from whence he heard the joyous voices.

“Hark! hark again!” cried Fitz-Alwine, starting up. “Is not that the sound of Sir Guy’s horn?”

“Yea, my lord,” replied one of the Knight’s men; “it could not be mistaken, my master’s horn hath its own peculiar note.”

“Victory, then!” cried the old man “the brave and worthy Sir Guy hath slain Robin Hood.”

“An hundred Sir Guys could not succeed in beating Robin Hood, if they attacked him one by one and fairly, roared poor Little John, his heart oppressed by terrible anguish.

“Silence, thou long-legged dolt! answered the Baron, brutally; “and if thine eyes be good, look toward the end of the glade, where thou wilt see, hurrying to us, Sir Guy Gisborne, the vanquished of thy wretched chief.”

John raised himself, and saw, as the Baron had said, a yeoman with his body half enveloped in a horse’s hide. Robin imitated the gait of the Knight so well that John thought he recognised the man whom he had left face to face with his friend.

“Ah, the ruffian! the miscreant! shouted the young man in despair. “He hath killed Robin Hood! He hath killed the most valiant Saxon in all England! Vengeance! vengeance! vengeance! Robin Hood hath friends, and in Nottinghamshire there are a thousand hands able and willing to punish his murderer!”

“To thy prayers, dog!” cried the Baron, “and leave us in peace. Thy master is dead, and thou shalt die like him. To thy prayers, and try to preserve thy soul from the tortures which await thy body. Dost think thou hast a claim upon our pity in pursuing with thy vain threats the noble Knight who hath rid the earth of an infamous Outlaw? Approach, brave Sir Guy,” continued Lord Fitz-Alwine, addressing Rob

Hood, who advanced quickly. "Thou dost merit all our praise and consideration; thou hast rid thy country from this scourge of Outlaws, thou hast killed a man whom the popular terror declared invincible, thou hast slain the celebrated Robin Hood! Ask me for the reward due to thy good offices. I will place at thy disposal my favour at Court, the support of my eternal friendship. Ask what thou wilt, noble Knight, I am ready to do thy bidding."

Robin had taken in the situation at a glance, and the fierce look which John shot at him revealed to him even more clearly than the old Baron's protestations of gratitude, how complete was the success of his disguise.

"I merit not such thanks," answered Robin, imitating the Knight's voice to the echo. "I have slain mine adversary in fair combat, and since you are willing to allow me to claim the reward of my prowess, I ask, my dear Baron, in return for the service I have just rendered you, permission to array myself against yonder rascal whom you have seized. He sits glaring at me so that he doth quite anger me; I will e'en send him to bear his amiable comrade company in the next world."

"As you will," returned Lord Fitz-Alwine, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Kill him, an it so please you, his life is yours."

Robin Hood's voice had not deceived Little John, and a sigh of unspeakable satisfaction had lifted from his heart the terrible anxiety he was beginning to experience.

Robin approached John, followed by the Baron.

"My Lord," said Robin, laughingly, "pray leave me alone with this villain. I am convinced that the fear of an ignominious death will compel him to confide in me the secret of the hiding-place of the robber band. Keep back, and draw off your men, for I will treat any inquisitive person in the manner that I used toward the man whose head you see here."

As he spoke these words, Robin put the bloody trophy into Lord Fitz-Alwine's arms. The old man uttered a cry of horror; Sir Guy's disfigured head rolled upon the ground, face downwards.

The terrified soldiers decamped with all speed.

Robin Hood, left alone with Little John, hastened to cut his bonds, and put into his hands the bow and arrows which had belonged to Sir Guy; then he wound his horn.

Hardly had the sound stirred the depths of the wood ere a great clamour was heard as the branches of the trees were thrust violently aside to make way, first for Will Scarlett, whose face was of so vivid a red as to approach purple, and next for a body of the Merrie Men, sword in hand.

This terrifying apparition appeared to the Baron more like a dream than an actual fact. He saw without perceiving, heard without understanding, his mind and body were completely paralysed by an overwhelming terror. This moment of supreme agony seemed of endless duration; he made a step forward towards the supposed Norman, and found himself face to face with Robin Hood, who, having rid himself of the horse-skin and drawn his sword, commanded the respect of the soldiers as well as that of their no less dejected leader.

The Baron, with clenched teeth and unable to utter a word, turned abruptly, mounted his horse, and without any orders to his men galloped away with all haste.

The soldiers, carried away by so praiseworthy an example, imitated their Chief and followed in his steps.

"May the devil catch thee in his claws!" cried Little John, furiously; "but thy cowardice shall not save thee; my arrows carry far enow to strike thee dead."

"Shoot not, John," said Robin, holding his friend by the arm. "Thou canst see that by all the laws of nature this man hath not long to live; why then hasten his death by a few days? Leave him to his remorse, to his loneliness—cut off from all family ties, a prey to his malevolent helplessness."

"Hark ye, Robin, I cannot let the old thief save himself thus; let me give him a lesson, as reminder of his sojourn in the Forest. I will not kill him, I give thee my word."

"So be it, then; draw, but swiftly, or he will be out of sight round the bend of the road."

John let fly an arrow, and, judging by the way in which the Baron bounded in his saddle and the haste he made to draw the arrow from the wound, it was



impossible to doubt that it would be long ere he would mount a horse again or be able to sit at ease in a chair.

Little John shook hands warmly with his rescuer. Will asked Robin to give them an account of his doings, and the latter hours of this memorable day slipped merrily away.

## CHAPTER XI

**B**ARON FITZ-ALWINE looked upon Robin as the curse of his existence, and his insatiable desire to avenge himself liberally for all the humiliations he had suffered at the young man's hands did not lose one whit of its intensity. Beaten on every occasion by his enemy, the Baron returned to the charge, swearing, both before and after the attack, to exterminate the whole band of Outlaws.

When the Baron found himself forced to recognise that it was quite impossible to vanquish Robin by force, he resolved to have recourse to cunning. This new plan of conduct having been long meditated, he hoped that he had at last discovered a means of decoying Robin into his snares. Without losing a moment, the Baron sent for a rich merchant of Nottingham and confided to him his plans, recommending him the while to keep the most profound silence regarding them.

This man, who was of a feeble and irresolute character, was easily led to share in the Baron's hatred for one whom he described as a highway robber.

On the morrow of his interview with Lord Fitz-Alwine, the merchant, true to the promise he had given the irascible old man, gathered together in his house the principal citizens of the town, and proposed to them to go with him to ask the Sheriff to establish a public shooting match, where the men of Nottinghamshire might try their skill against those of Yorkshire.

"The two Counties are not a little jealous of each other," added the merchant, "and for the honour of the town, I should be happy to offer our neighbours an opportunity of proving their skill at archery; or, better still, an occasion to set forth the incontestable superiority of our able marksmen. And in

order to equalise the match between the rival parties, we would hold the encounter on the borders of the two Counties, the victor's prize being an arrow with silver barb and feathers of gold."

The citizens, called together by the Baron's ally, received the suggestion with a generous heartiness, and, in company with the merchant, they went to ask Lord Fitz-Alwine's permission to announce an archery competition between the rival Counties.

The old man, delighted at the prospect of success of the first part of his project, concealed his secret satisfaction, and, with an air of supreme indifference, gave the required consent; even adding that, if his presence would give any pleasure or be of any advantage to the success of the festivities, it would be both a pleasure and a duty to him to preside over the games.

The citizens cried unanimously that the presence of their liege Lord would be a heaven-sent blessing, and they seemed as happy at receiving the promise of the Baron's presence as if the latter had been bound to them by the closest ties. They left the Castle with light hearts, and made the Baron's condescension known to their fellow citizens with enthusiastic gestures, and eyes and mouths agape with astonishment. Poor fellows, they were so little used to politeness from a Norman Lord.

A proclamation, learnedly worded, announced that a match would be thrown open to the inhabitants of the Counties of Nottingham and York. The day was fixed, the spot chosen between the forest of Barnsdale and the village of Mansfield. As great care had been taken to spread the news of this public joust to every corner of the two Counties concerned, it reached Robin Hood's ears. The young man at once resolved to enter the lists and sustain the honour of Nottingham. From further information which he received, Robin learned that Baron Fitz-Alwine would preside over the games. This condescension, so little in harmony with the old man's morose character, explained to Robin the secret end to which the noble Lord's wishes tended. "Oh, indeed," said our friend to himself, "we must needs attempt this venture with every necessary precaution for a valorous defence."

The eve of the day on which the contest was to take place, Robin assembled his men, and announced to them his intention of bearing off the archery prize for the honour of the town of Nottingham.

"My lads," he added, "hearken to me. Baron Fitz-Alwine will preside over the games, and there must certainly be some particular reason why he should be so anxious to please the yeomen. I think I know the cause—it is to attempt my capture. Therefore I shall take with me to the range one hundred and forty companions. I will enter six of them as competitors for the prize; the others will be dispersed among the crowd in such manner as to re-assemble at the first call in case of treachery. Hold your arms ready, and prepare for a desperate combat."

Robin Hood's orders were faithfully carried out, and at the appointed hour his men, in little groups, took the road to Mansfield, and arrived without hindrance at the place, where a crowd was already assembled.

Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scarlett, Much, and five others of the Merrie Men were to take part in the contest; they were all differently dressed, and hardly spoke to one another, in order to avoid any danger of being recognised.

The place chosen for the archery was a large glade situated on the borders of Barnsdale Forest, and a short distance from the main road. An immense crowd gathered from the neighbouring country, and pressed noisily into the enclosure, in the centre of which were placed the butts. A platform had been erected opposite the shooting range; this was for the Baron, on whom devolved the honour of judging the shooting and awarding the prize.

The Baron soon arrived, accompanied by an escort of soldiers, fifty of his men having already mingled with the crowd, clad in yeomen's dress, with orders to arrest any suspicious characters, and take them before the Baron.

These precautions taken, Lord Fitz-Alwine had hopes that Robin Hood, whose adventurous nature courted danger, would come to the joust alone, and he would have the satisfaction of taking a revenge, for which he had waited beyond the term of human patience.

The match began; three men from

Nottingham grazed the target, each of them touched the mark without reaching the centre. After them came three yeomen from Yorkshire, who were equally successful. Will Scarlett presented himself in his turn, and he pierced the centre of the mark with the greatest ease.

A shout of triumph greeted Will's prowess, and Little John took his place. The young man sent his arrow into the hole made by William. Then, even before the range-keeper had had time to take it out, Robin Hood's arrow broke it in pieces and took its place.

The enraptured crowd became violently excited, and the men of Nottingham laid big wagers.

The three best archers of Yorkshire came forward, and with steady hands, hit the bull's-eye.

It was now the turn of the Northerners to cry victory, and accept the wagers of the citizens of Nottingham.

All this time the Baron, but little interested in the success of either one or other of the Counties, was attentively watching the archers. Robin Hood had attracted his attention; but as his sight had for some time been getting feeble, it was impossible for him to recognise his enemy's features.

Much and the Merrie Men selected by Robin to compete touched the mark without difficulty; four yeomen followed them, and succeeded equally well.

The greater number of the archers were so well used to shooting at a target, that it appeared as though the victory would be to none in particular, and it was decided to set up wands, and choose seven men out of the victors on either side.

The citizens of Nottingham chose Robin Hood and his Merrie Men to sustain the honour of their county, while the inhabitants of Yorkshire took as their champion the yeomen who had proved the best archers.

The yeomen began. The first split the wand, the second grazed it, and the third skimmed it so closely that it appeared impossible that their adversaries would be able to surpass their skill.

Will Scarlett advanced, and taking up his bow, he shot underhand, and broke the willow wand into two pieces.

"Hurrah! for Nottinghamshire," cried the citizens of Nottingham, throwing their caps into the air, without in the



least considering how impossible it would be to recover them.

New wands were prepared. Robin's men, from Little John to the least of the archers, split them easily. Robin's turn came; he shot three arrows at the wands with such rapidity that, had it not been seen that the wands were shattered, it would have been impossible to believe in such skill.

Several fresh attempts were made, but Robin triumphed over all his adversaries, although they were all tried bowmen, and it began to be said that Robin Hood himself could not compete with the yeoman in the red doublet, for it was thus the crowd had named Robin.

This supposition, so dangerous to the young man, soon became an affirmation; and the report circulated that the victor was none other than Robin Hood.

The Yorkshiremen, smarting under defeat, hastened to assert that the match was not an equal one between them and a man of Robin Hood's strength. They complained of the slur cast upon their honour as archers, of the loss of their money (the most weighty consideration with them), and they attempted, no doubt with a hope of eluding their wagers, to turn the discussion into a quarrel.

As soon as the Merrie Men became aware of their adversaries' ill-will, they rallied together, and formed, though without apparent intention, a group of eighty-six men.

While the seeds of strife were being sown among the wagerers, Robin Hood was borne to the Sheriff amid the joyous acclamations of the citizens of Nottingham.

"Way for the victor! Hurrah for the skilful archer!" cried two hundred voices. "He is the winner of the prize."

Robin Hood, with eyes modestly cast down, stood before Lord Fitz-Alwine in the most respectful attitude.

The Baron stared hard to try and descry the young man's features. A certain resemblance of figure, perhaps even of dress, led the Baron to believe that the invincible Outlaw stood before him; but torn between conflicting emotions of doubt and a faint certitude, he could not show too great precipitation without compromising the success of his plan. He held out the arrow to Robin, hoping to recognise the young man by the sound of his voice. But Robin cheated his hopes;

he took the arrow, and bowed politely as he stuck it in his belt.

A moment passed; Robin pretended to move off. Then, as the Baron, desperate at seeing him thus escape, was about to take decisive measures; he raised his head, and looking full at the old man, said with a laugh—

"Words fail me to express the value which I attach to the present you have just given me, my excellent friend. I shall return with a heart full of gratitude to the green trees of my fair dwelling-place, and there I will treasure with care this precious token of friendship. I wish you a very good day, noble Lord of Nottingham."

"Stop, stop!" roared the Baron. "Soldiers, do your duty! That man is Robin Hood. Seize him!"

"Miserable coward!" returned Robin. "You proclaimed that the game was public, open to all, destined for the amusements of every one without exception and without fear."

"An Outlaw hath no rights," said the Baron; "thou wast not included in the appeal to all good citizens. Now then, soldiers, seize the robber."

"I will slay the first who advanceth," cried Robin, in a stentorian voice, directing his bow toward the fellow who approached him. But at sight of his menacing attitude, the man drew back, and disappeared into the crowd.

Robin wound his horn, and his Merrie Men, prepared to sustain a bloody combat, advanced quickly to protect him. Stepping back into the midst of his men, he ordered them to bend their bows and retreat slowly, for the Baron's soldiers were too numerous to make it possible to fight against them without risking much bloodshed.

The Baron precipitated himself before his men, and in a furious voice commanded them to arrest the Outlaws. The soldiers prepared to obey, and the Yorkshiremen, irritated by their defeat and exasperated by the loss of their money in the wagers they had just made, joined the Baron's men in pursuing the Foresters. But the citizens of Nottingham owed Robin Hood too great a debt of friendship and gratitude to leave him helpless at the mercy of the soldiers and their Lord. They opened a way for the Merrie Men, and, saluting them with friendly acclamation, reclosed it again behind them.

Unhappily, Robin Hood's adherents

were neither numerous enough nor strong enough to protect his discreet flight for any length of time; they were obliged to break their ranks, and the men-at-arms gained the road along which the Foresters had fled.

Then began a desperate chase. From time to time the Foresters faced about and sent a volley of arrows at the soldiers, who retaliated as well as they were able, and in spite of the ravages made in their ranks, courageously continued the pursuit.

After this exchange of hostilities had lasted an hour, Little John, who was marching at the head of the Foresters with Robin, stopped suddenly, and said to his young Chief—

“My good friend, my hour is come; I am grievously wounded, my strength faileth me, I cannot keep up the pace.”

“What!” cried Robin; “thou art wounded?”

“Yea,” replied John, “in the knee; and I have lost so much blood in the last half-hour that my strength faileth me. I cannot stand on my feet.” And as he spoke, John sank to the ground.

“Great Heavens!” cried Robin, kneeling beside his brave comrade. “John, good John, take courage; try to rouse thyself and lean upon me. I am not tired, and will support thy steps. Only a few minutes more, and we shall be in safety. Let me bind up thy wound, it will give thee great relief.”

“Nay, Robin, ’tis useless,” replied John, in a weak voice; “my leg is almost paralysed; ’tis impossible for me to move. Do not stay. Abandon a useless wretch who only asks for death.”

“I abandon thee!” cried Robin Hood. “Thou dost know that I am incapable of so cruel an action.”

“It would not be in the least a cruel action, Robin, but a duty. Thou must answer to God for the lives of these brave men who have given themselves, body and soul, to thee. Leave me here, therefore, and if thou lovest me, if thou hast ever loved me, do not let that wicked Baron find me alive; plunge thy hunting-knife into my heart, that I may die like an honest and brave Saxon. Harken to my prayer, Robin, and kill me; thou wilt spare me cruel sufferings and the unhappiness of again seeing our enemies; they are so cowardly, these Normans, that they would take a delight in insulting me in my last moments.”

“Come, John,” replied Robin, much affected, “do not ask me anything so impossible. Thou knowest well that I would not leave thee to die helpless and away from me; thou knowest that I would sacrifice mine own life and the lives of my men to preserve thine. Thou knowest, further, that far from abandoning thee, I would shed my last drop of blood to defend thee. When I fall, John, I trust that it will be at thy side, and then we shall depart for the next world with hands and hearts united as they have ever been here below.”

“We will fight and die beside thee, if Heaven withholds its aid,” said Will, embracing his cousin; “and thou shalt see that there are still brave men in the world. My friends,” he continued, turning to the Foresters, who had come to a halt, “here is your friend, your comrade, mortally wounded; do you think that we should abandon him to the vengeance of the wretches who pursue us?”

“No! no! an hundred times no!” cried the Merrie Men, with one accord. “Let us surround him and die in his defence.”

“Allow me,” said the vigorous Much, advancing. “It seemeth useless to risk our lives without a cause. John is only wounded in the knee, he will therefore bear being carried without fear of losing blood. I will take him on my shoulders and carry him as long as my legs will carry me.”

“When you fail, Much,” said Will, “I will take your place, and another after me. Is it not so?”

“Yea! yea!” replied the gallant Foresters.

In spite of John’s attempt at resistance, Much raised him with a strong hand, and with Robin’s assistance took the wounded man on his back, after which the fugitives continued quickly on their way. This forced halt had enabled the soldiers to gain on the Foresters, and they now came in sight. The Merrie Men sent a flight of arrows among them, and redoubled their pace in the hope of reaching their retreat, well persuaded that the soldiers would never dare to follow them there. At the end of a branch road leading from the main road, the Foresters descried above the trees the turrets of a Castle.

“To whom doth this domain belong?” asked Robin. “Doth any one among you know the owner?”



"I do, Captain," said a man, who had been but lately enrolled in the band.

"Good. Dost know whether we should be favourably received by its Lord? For we are lost, an the gates be closed to us."

"I will answer for the benevolence of the owner, for Sir Richard of the Plain is a brave Saxon."

"Sir Richard of the Plain!" cried Robin. "Then are we saved! Forward, my lads, forward! Praised be the Holy Virgin!" he continued, crossing himself gratefully; "she never abandons the unfortunate in the hour of their need. Will Scarlett, go thou on in advance, and say to the keeper of the drawbridge, that Robin Hood and a band of his men, pursued by Normans, ask permission of Sir Richard to take refuge within his Castle walls."

With the speed of an arrow, William covered the space which separated him from Sir Richard's domain.

While the young man accomplished his errand, Robin and his companions proceeded toward the Castle.

Soon a white flag was hoisted on the outer wall, a horseman emerged from the Gate, and, followed by Will, advanced at full speed to meet Robin Hood. Arrived in the young Chief's presence, he leapt to the ground, holding out both hands.

"Sir," said the young man, grasping Robin's hand with visible emotion, "I am Herbert Gower, Sir Richard's son. My father wishes me to tell you that you are welcome to our home, and that he will feel the happiest of men, an you will give him the opportunity of discharging even a portion of the great debt we owe you. I am yours, body and soul, Sir Robin," added the young man, with an outburst of profound gratitude, "do with me what you will."

"I thank you with all my heart, my young friend," replied Robin, embracing Herbert; "your offer is tempting, for I should be proud to place so good a horseman in the ranks of my lieutenants. But for the present we must think of the danger that threatens my men. They are worn out with fatigue; my dearest comrade hath been wounded in the leg by a Norman arrow; and for near two hours we have been pursued by Baron Fitz-Alwine's soldiers. Behold, my lad," continued Robin, pointing out to the youth a band of soldiers who began to

appear upon the road, "they will overtake us, an we do not hasten to seek shelter behind the Castle walls."

"The drawbridge is already lowered," said Herbert. "Let us hasten, and in ten minutes you will have nothing to fear from your enemies."

The Sheriff and his men arrived in time to witness the little troop defiling along the drawbridge of the Castle. Exasperated by this fresh defeat, the Baron immediately took the audacious resolution of commanding Sir Richard, in the King's name, to deliver up to him these men, who, doubtless abusing his credulity, had placed themselves under his protection.

Whereupon, at Lord Fitz-Alwine's request, the Knight appeared upon the ramparts.

"Sir Richard of the Plain," said the Baron, whose people had told him the name of the owner of the Castle, "do you know who the men are that have entered your domain?"

"I know them, my Lord," replied the Knight, coldly.

"What! you know that the rogue who commands this troop of robbers is an Outlaw, an enemy of the King, and yet you give him shelter? Do you know that you incur the penalty of treason?"

"I know that this Castle and the grounds that surround it are my property. I know that I am master here, and do as I please, and receive whom I choose. That is my answer, Sir. Will you withdraw at once, an you would avoid a combat in which you would not gain the advantage, for I have an hundred men-at-arms with the best sharpened arrows in all the country-side at my disposal. Good day, my Lord."

And with this ironical reply the Knight left the ramparts.

The Baron, who felt that he was not well enough supported by his soldiers to attempt an attack on the Castle, decided to retreat; and, with suppressed rage in his heart, as can be well imagined, he took the road to Nottingham with his men.

"Welcome, a thousand times, to the house which I owe to thy goodness, Robin Hood," said the Knight, embracing his guest; "welcome, a thousand times!"

"I thank thee, Sir Knight," said Robin. "But, prithee, speak not of the paltry service which I had the satisfaction to

render thee. Thy friendship hath already repaid it an hundred-fold, and to-day thou savest me from a real danger. Hark ye, I have brought a wounded man; I pray that thou wilt kindly entreat him."

"He shall have the same consideration as thyself, dear Robin."

"The worthy lad is not unknown to thee, Sir Knight," replied Robin. "It is Little John, my first lieutenant; the dearest and most trusty of my companions."

"My wife and Lilas will look to him," returned Sir Richard. "And he will be well cared for; be easy on that score."

"If you are speaking of Little John, or rather of the biggest John, sure, who ever wielded a cudgel," said Herbert, "he is already in the hands of a clever leech from York, who hath been here since last evening. He hath already tended the wound and promiseth a speedy cure."

"God be praised!" said Robin Hood; "my dear John is out of danger. Now, Sir Knight," added he, "I am at the disposal of thyself and of thy family."

"My wife and Lilas are impatient to greet thee," said the Knight. "They await thee in the next room."

"Father," said Herbert, with a laugh, "I have just told my friend—I mean the young man, Will Scarlett—that I am the husband of the most beautiful woman in the world. And do you know what he replied?"

Sir Richard and Robin Hood exchanged smiles.

"He declared that he possessed a wife whose beauty was unrivalled. But he shall see Lilas, and then . . ."

"Ah! had you but seen Maude, you would not speak thus, young man. Would he, Robin?"

"Certainly Herbert would think Maude very pretty," replied Robin, in a conciliatory tone.

"Doubtless, doubtless," said Herbert. "But Lilas is marvellously beautiful; and, in my opinion, there exists no woman to be compared with her."

Will Scarlett listened to Herbert with a frown. The poor young husband's self-love was wounded. But we must do him the justice to say that, when he beheld Lilas, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and admiration.

Lilas had fulfilled all the promises of her youth; the pretty child we saw at St. Mary's Abbey had become a beautiful

woman. Tall, slim, and graceful as a young fawn, Lilas advanced toward the visitors with downcast eyes and a lovely smile upon her rosy lips. She raised two timid blue eyes to Robin Hood and held out her hand.

"Our deliverer is no stranger to me," she said sweetly.

Mute with admiration, Robin Hood raised the white hand to his lips.

Herbert, who had followed Robin, said to Will, with a smile of tender pride, "Friend William, this is my wife. . . ."

"She is very beautiful," whispered Will; "but Maude . . ." he added, in a still lower voice.

He said no more. Robin Hood commanded him by a glance to have no eyes save for Herbert's charming wife.

After a mutual exchange of compliments between Sir Richard's wife and her guests, the Knight, leaving Will and his son to talk to the ladies, took Robin Hood aside, and said—

"My dear Robin, I wish to prove to thee that there is no man in the world whom I love like thee, and I declare again my friendship for thee, so that thou mayest carry out thy plans according to thy will. Thou wilt be secure here so long as this house can shield thee, so long as there remains a man standing upon its ramparts, and, sword in hand, I will defy all the Sheriffs in the Kingdom. I have given orders for the Gates to be closed, and for none to be permitted to enter the Castle without my leave. My men are under arms, and ready to offer a stout resistance to any attack. Thy men are resting; let them remain one week in peace, and when that time hath elapsed, we will take counsel together as to the part thou shouldst play."

"I willingly consent to remain here some days," answered Robin. "But on one condition only."

"What is that?"

"My Merrie Men will return to-morrow to Barnsdale Forest. Will Scarlett shall accompany them, and he will return hither with his dear Maude, Marian, and poor Little John's wife."

Sir Richard readily acquiesced in Robin's wishes, and all was arranged to the mutual satisfaction of the two friends.

A fortnight passed happily away at the Castle on the Plain, and at the end of that time, Robin, Little John, entirely cured of his wound, Will Scarlett and the



incomparable Maude, Marian and Winifred, found themselves once more beneath the green trees of Barnsdale Forest.

The day after his return to Nottingham, Baron Fitz-Alwine made his way to London, obtained an audience of the King, and recounted to him his pitiful adventure.

"Your Majesty," said the Baron, "will find it strange, no doubt, that a Knight with whom Robin had sought shelter should have refused to deliver up this great criminal to me, even though I asked in the King's name."

"What! a Knight, and failed to show respect to his Sovereign!" cried Henry, in an irritated tone.

"Yea, Sire, the Knight, Sir Richard of the Plain, refused my righteous demand. He replied that he was king of his domains, and cared but little for the power of your Majesty."

As may be perceived, the worthy Baron lied freely for the good of his cause.

"Well," replied the King, "we will judge for ourselves of the impudence of this rogue. We will be in Nottingham within fifteen days. Bring with you as many men as you think needful to give battle, and if any untoward occurrence should prevent our joining you, act as best you can. Carry off this indomitable Robin Hood and Sir Richard. Imprison them in your gloomiest dungeon; and when you have them safe under lock and key, advise our justices. We will then reflect upon our course of action."

Baron Fitz-Alwine obeyed the King's orders to the letter. He assembled a numerous troop of men and marched at their head against Sir Richard's Castle. But the poor Baron was the sport of fate, for he arrived the day after Robin's departure.

The idea of pursuing Robin to his retreat did not commend itself to the old Baron's mind. A certain remembrance, and a certain soreness, which still rendered riding painful to him, checked his ardour in that direction. He resolved, as he could do no better, to take Sir Richard, and, as an assault of the place would be a difficult thing to attempt and dangerous to put into execution, he made up his mind to attain a more certain success by means of treachery.

The Baron dispersed his men, keeping with him only a score of stout fellows, and placed himself in ambush at a short dis-

tance from the Castle. He had not long to wait. The next morning, Sir Richard, his son, and some followers fell into the trap laid for them, and in spite of the valiant resistance they offered, they were vanquished, gagged, tied to horses, and carried away to Nottingham.

One of Sir Richard's servants succeeded in making his escape, and came, all black and blue with the blows he had received, to announce the sad news to his mistress.

Lady Gower, distracted with grief, wished to join her husband; but Lilas made the unhappy woman understand that this step would be of no help to them. She advised her mother to apply to Robin Hood; he alone was capable of judging calmly of Sir Richard's position and effecting his deliverance.

Lady Gower yielded to the entreaties of the younger woman, and without losing an instant, she chose two faithful servants, mounted a horse, and set out in all haste for Barnsdale Forest.

A Forester, who had remained ill at the Castle, was now sufficiently recovered to act as guide to the Trysting Tree.

By a providential chance, Robin Hood was at his post.

"God bless you!" cried Lady Gower, throwing herself with feverish haste from her horse; "I come to you as a suppliant. I come to ask you yet another favour in the Holy Virgin's name."

"Lady, you frighten me. For mercy's sake, what ails you?" cried Robin, overcome with astonishment. "Tell me what you desire; I am ready to obey."

"Oh, Robin," sobbed the poor woman, "my husband and my son have been carried off by your enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham. Oh, Robin, save my husband, save my child! Stop the wretches who have taken them away; they are few in number, and have only this minute left the Castle."

"Be reassured, Madam," said Robin Hood. "Your husband shall soon be given back to you. Remember that Sir Richard is a Knight, and under this title he has a right to the law of the Kingdom. Whatever the power of Baron Fitz-Alwine, it does not permit him to put to death a noble Saxon. He must bring Sir Richard to trial, if the fault of which he is accused offer occasion for trial. Take courage, dry your tears; your husband and son shall soon be in your arms."

"May Heaven bless you!" cried Lady Gower, clasping her hands.

"Now, Madam, allow me to give you some advice. Return to the Castle, keep all the gates shut, and do not allow any stranger to enter. For my part, I will assemble my men, and fly at their head in pursuit of the Baron."

Lady Gower, much reassured by the young man's consoling words, left him with a more tranquil heart. Robin Hood announced to his men the capture of Sir Richard, and his desire to capture the Sheriff. The Foresters gave a shout, half of indignation against the Baron's treachery, half of joy at having a fresh opportunity of bending their bows, and gleefully they prepared to set out.

Robin put himself at the head of his valiant troop, and accompanied by Little John, Will Scarlett, and Much, started in pursuit of the Sheriff.

After a long and fatiguing march, they reached the village of Mansfield, where Robin learnt from an Innkeeper, that, after having rested, the Baron's soldiers had continued their way to Nottingham. Robin made his men refresh themselves, left Much and Little John with them, and accompanied by Will, galloped at the best speed of a good horse to the Trysting Tree of Sherwood Forest.

Arrived at the confines of the subterranean dwelling, Robin blew a joyous flourish upon his hunting horn, and a hundred Foresters ran up at the well-known call.

Robin Hood took this fresh troop with him, and so arranged them as to get the Baron's men between the two troops; for the men left at Mansfield were to take the road to Nottingham after an hour's repose.

The Merrrie Men soon arrived at a spot, a short distance from the town, where they learned to their great satisfaction that the Sheriff's troops had not yet passed. Robin chose an advantageous position, hid some of his men, and placed the remainder on the opposite side of the road.

The appearance of half a dozen soldiers soon announced the approach of the Sheriff and his cavalcade.

The Foresters prepared to give them a warm welcome. The advance guard passed beyond the limits of the ambush without hindrance, and when they were far enough for the troop that came

behind to imagine there was nothing more to fear, the sound of a horn rang through the air, and a flight of arrows saluted the front rank of soldiers. The Sheriff commanded a halt, and sent some thirty men to beat the underwood; they went to their death.

Divided into two groups and attacked on both sides at once, the soldiers were soon forced to lay down their arms and cry for mercy.

This exploit terminated, the Merrie Men threw themselves upon the Baron's escort, who, being well mounted and used to arms, defended themselves with vigour.

Robin and his men fought with the hope of delivering Sir Richard and his son; the soldiers from London, on their side, sought to gain the reward promised by the King to whoever should capture Robin Hood. The struggle was desperate and furious on both sides, and the victory uncertain, when suddenly the shouts of another band of Foresters told that the situation was now to be changed. It was Little John and his band, who flung themselves into the conflict with an irresistible violence.

Some ten archers already surrounded Sir Richard and his son, cut their bonds, gave them weapons, and, undismayed by the danger to which they were exposing themselves, fought hand to hand with men clad in coats of mail. With the heedless impetuosity of youth, Herbert, with some of the Merrie Men, hurled himself into the midst of the Baron's escort. For nearly a quarter of an hour the courageous youth held his own against the horsemen; but, overcome by numbers, he was about to pay for his foolhardiness, when an archer, either to help the young man or to precipitate the issue of the battle, took aim at the Baron, and pierced his throat with an arrow, flung him from his horse, and cut off his head; then, lifting it in the air on the point of his lance, he cried in a loud voice—

"Norman dogs, behold your Chief! Contemplate for the last time the ugly face of your proud Sheriff, and lay down your arms or prepare yourselves to meet a like . . ."

The Forester did not finish his sentence, a Norman broke open his head, and he rolled in the dust.

The death of Lord Fitz-Alwine constrained the Normans to lay down their arms and ask for quarter.



By Robin's orders some of the Merrie Men conducted the vanquished men to Nottingham, while, at the head of the rest of his band, he carried away the dead, succoured the wounded, and removed all traces of the combat.

"Farewell for ever, thou man of blood and iron," said Robin, throwing a look of disgust at the Baron's corpse. "At last thou hast met thy death, and wilt receive the reward of thine evil deeds. Thy heart hath been covetous and pitiless, thy hand hath been as a scourge to the unhappy Saxons. Thou hast oppressed thy vassals, betrayed thy King, and abandoned thy daughter. Thou dost merit all the tortures of hell. Yet do I pray the God of infinite mercy to have pity on thy soul and to pardon thy sins."

"Sir Richard," said Robin, when the old man's corpse had been raised by the soldiers, and borne away in the direction of Nottingham, "this hath been a sorry day. We have saved thee from death, but not from ruin, for thy goods will be confiscated. I could wish, Richard, that I had never known thee."

"How is that?" asked the Knight, in great surprise.

"Because without mine aid, thou wouldst assuredly have succeeded in paying thy debt to the Abbey, and thou wouldst not have been obliged to render me service out of gratitude. I am the involuntary cause of all thy trouble. Thou wilt be banished, outlawed from the Kingdom, thy house become the property of a Norman, thy family will suffer, and it will be my fault. . . . Thou canst see for thyself, Sir Richard, how dangerous my friendship is!"

"My dear Robin," said the Knight, with an expression of ineffable tenderness, "my wife and my children are alive, thou art my friend, what have I to regret? If the King condemn me, I will leave my Castle, deprived of all, but still happy and blessing the hour that led me to noble Robin Hood."

The young man gently shook his head.

"Let us speak seriously of thy situation, my dear Richard," returned he. "The news of the events which have just occurred will be sent to London, and the King will be pitiless. We have attacked his own soldiers, and he will make thee pay for their defeat, not only by banishment, but by an ignominious death. Leave thy home, come with me. I give

thee the word of an honest man that while a breath of life is in my body, thou shalt be safe under the care of my Merrie Men."

"I gladly accept thy generous offer, Robin Hood. I accept it with joy and gratitude. But before establishing myself in the Forest, which my children's future makes my duty, I am going to try and soften the King's anger. The offer of a considerable sum of money may induce him to spare the life of a well-born Knight."

That very evening Sir Richard sent a message to London to ask a powerful member of his family to speak to the King for him. The messenger came back from London at full speed, and announced to his master that Henry II., deeply irritated by the death of Baron Fitz-Alwine, had sent a company of his best soldiers to the Knight's Castle, with orders to hang him and his son to the first tree on the roadside. The Chief of this company, who was a penniless Norman, had received from the King's hand the Castle of the Plain as a gift to himself and his descendants to the last generation.

Sir Richard's kinsman likewise sent word to the condemned man that a proclamation was to be made in the Counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, offering an immense reward to the man clever enough to capture Robin Hood and give him, alive or dead, into the hands of the Sheriff of either of these Counties.

Sir Richard at once warned Robin Hood of the danger menacing his life, and announced his own immediate arrival.

Actively assisted by his vassals, the Knight despoiled the Castle of all that it contained, and sent his furniture, arms, and plate to the trysting-place of Barnsdale.

When the last wagon had crossed the drawbridge, Sir Richard, his wife, Herbert, and Lilas rode away from their dear home, and gained the Forest without hindrance.

When the troop sent by the King reached the Castle, the doors were open and the rooms completely empty.

The new owner of Sir Richard's domains seemed much disappointed to find the place deserted, but as he had passed the best part of his life in struggling against the freaks of fortune, he readily accommodated himself to his circumstances.

Consequently he sent away the soldiers and, to the great despair of the vassals, established himself as master of the Castle of the Plain.

## CHAPTER XII

THREE peaceful years followed the events we have just related. Robin Hood's band had developed in a remarkable manner, and the renown of their intrepid Chief had spread all over England.

The death of Henry II. had placed his son Richard on the throne, and the latter, after having squandered all the Crown treasure, had set out for the Holy Land, abandoning the Regency of the Kingdom to his brother, Prince John, a man of dissolute habits and extreme avarice, whose feeble spirit rendered him incapable of fulfilling the high mission entrusted to him.

The misery of the people, already very great under Henry, became complete destitution during the long period of this bloodstained regency. Robin Hood, with inexhaustible generosity, relieved the cruel sufferings of the poor in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and he was the idol of them all. But if he gave to the poor, he took from the rich in return, and Normans, prelates, and monks contributed largely, to their great vexation, to the good works of the noble Outlaw.

Marian still lived in the Forest, and the young couple still loved each other as tenderly as in the first days of their happy union.

Time had not lessened William's passion for his charming wife, and in the eyes of the faithful Saxon, Maude, like a pure diamond, still kept her immutable beauty.

Little John and Much still congratulated themselves on their choice in taking to wife sweet Winifred and witty Barbara; and as for Will's brothers, they had no reason to repent of their hasty marriages; they were happy, and life was rose-coloured to their eyes.

Before we leave for ever two persons who have played an important part in our story, we will pay them a friendly visit at the Castle of the Dale in the valley of Mansfield.

Allan Clare and the Lady Christabel

still lived happily together. Their home, built chiefly under the Knight's directions, was a marvel of comfort and good taste. A circle of old trees shut off the garden from inquisitive eyes, and seemed to place an insuperable barrier around the place.

Beautiful children with sweet faces, living flowers in this oasis of love, enlivened the calm repose of the great House with their turbulent spirits, their laughing voices awoke the echoes, and the light steps of their little feet left a fleeting imprint on the sandy paths of the park. Allan and Christabel had remained young in heart, spirits, and looks, and for them a week seemed like a day—a day passed as quickly as an hour.

Christabel had not seen her father since her wedding with Allan Clare in Linton Abbey; for the irascible old man was cruelly determined to repulse all the efforts at reconciliation made by his daughter and the Knight. The Baron's death affected Christabel profoundly; but how much greater would her sorrow have been if, in losing the author of her being, she had lost a true father.

Allan had intended to maintain his rights to the Barony of Nottingham, and, by Robin's advice, who recommended him to make all haste in putting forward his very just claim, he was on the point of writing to the King, when he learned that the Castle of Nottingham, with its revenues and dependencies, had become the property of Prince John. Allan was too happy to risk his peace and well-being in a struggle which the superior rank of his adversary would render as dangerous as it was useless. He therefore took no further steps, and did not regret the loss of this magnificent heritage.

Robin's attacks upon the Normans and clergy became so frequent and so prejudicial to the rich that they attracted the attention of the Lord Chancellor of England, Longchamp, Bishop of Ely.

The Bishop resolved to put an end to the existence of the Merrie Men, and he prepared a serious expedition. Five hundred men, with Prince John at their head, arrived at Nottingham Castle, and there, after a rest of several days, they made arrangements to seize Robin Hood. He, however, being promptly informed of the intentions of this honourable troop, only laughed, and prepared to baffle all their attempts without exposing his men to the dangers of a fight.



He made his band take shelter, arrayed a dozen foresters in different costumes, and sent them to the Castle, where they presented themselves and offered to guide the troops into the inextricable recesses of the Forest.

These offers of service were accepted with alacrity by the chiefs of the troop; and as the Forest covered very nearly thirty miles of ground, it was not easy to take account of the turns and twists through which the guides led the unhappy soldiers. Now the whole of the troop was engulfed in the declivities of a valley, now they sank knee deep in the muddy water of swamps, now they found themselves dispersed on wild and barren heights. They cursed a soldier's life, wished the Lord Chancellor of England, Robin Hood, and his invisible band at the devil; for it should be observed that not a single green doublet had ever appeared upon the horizon.

At the close of the day the soldiers found themselves seven or eight miles from Nottingham Castle, which they must regain if they did not wish to pass a night in the open. They returned therefore, exhausted with fatigue, dying of hunger, and without having seen a thing that could reveal to them the presence of the Merrie Men.

For two weeks they renewed these fatiguing marches, and the result was always the same. Prince John, recalled to London by his pleasures, abandoned the undertaking, and returned with his escort to the town.

Two years after this expedition, Richard returned to England; and Prince John, who justly dreaded to face his brother, sought refuge from the King's anger within the walls of Nottingham Castle.

Richard Cœur de Lion, having learned of the Regent's obnoxious behaviour, stayed only three days in London; and then, accompanied by a small troop, marched resolutely against the rebel.

Nottingham Castle was besieged. After three days it surrendered at discretion, but Prince John managed to escape.

While fighting like the meanest of his soldiers, Richard had noticed that a troop of lusty yeomen gave him great assistance, and that it was owing to their valuable help that he was able to win the victory.

After the combat, and once installed in the Castle, Richard asked for information concerning the brave archers who had

come to his aid. But none could tell him, and he was obliged to seek information from the Reeve of Nottingham.

This Reeve was the same man upon whom Robin had played the trick of taking him into the Forest and making him pay three hundred gold crowns for his visit.

Under the influence of this poignant memory, the Reeve answered the King that the archers in question could certainly be none other than those of the terrible Robin Hood.

"This Robin Hood," added the malicious Innkeeper, "is a downright rascal. He supports his band at the expense of travellers; he robs honest men, kills the King's deer, and daily commits every sort of brigandage."

Halbert Lindsay, pretty Maude's foster-brother, who had had the good fortune to keep his place as Warden of the Castle, happened by chance to be near the King during this interview. Impelled by a feeling of gratitude toward Robin and by the natural impetuosity of a generous nature, he forgot his lowly condition, made a step towards the Reeve's august listener, and said in an eager tone—

"Sire, Robin Hood is an honest Saxon and an unhappy Outlaw. An if he despoil the rich of their wealth, yet he doth allay the misery of the poor; and in the Counties of Nottingham and York the name of Robin Hood is aye spoken with respect and eternal gratitude."

"Do you know this brave bowman personally?" asked the King of Halbert.

The question recalled Halbert to himself. He blushed crimson, and replied confusedly—

"I have seen Robin Hood, but it was a long time ago; and I only repeat to your Majesty what is said of him by the poor whom he hath saved from dying of starvation."

"Come, come, my good lad," said the King, with a smile, "hold up thy head and never disown thy friend. By the Holy Trinity, if his conduct be such as thou hast described to me, he is a man whose friendship must indeed be precious. I avow I should be charmed to meet this Outlaw; and as he hath done me a service, it shall never be said that Richard of England hath shown himself ungrateful, even toward an Outlaw. To-morrow evening I will hie me to Sherwood Forest."

The King kept his word. Early next morning, escorted by Knights and soldiers, and conducted by the Reeve, who did not find this expedition very attractive, he explored the paths, roads, and glades of the old wood, but the search was in vain. Robin Hood was not to be seen.

But little pleased at his ill-success, Richard sent for a man who fulfilled the functions of Keeper in the Forest, and asked him whether he knew of any means of encountering the Outlaw Chief.

"Your Majesty might search the wood for a year," rejoined the man, "without perceiving even the shadow of an Outlaw, if you went accompanied by an escort. Robin Hood avoids strife as much as possible—not from cowardice, for he knows the Forest so well that he hath naught to fear, not even the attack of five or six hundred men—but from moderation and prudence. If your Majesty wishes to see Robin Hood, it were best to go disguised as a Monk, with four or five of your Knights, and I will be your Majesty's guide. I swear by St. Dunstan that your lives will be in no danger. Robin Hood waylays ecclesiastics, he entertains them, he despoils them, but never doth he ill-use them."

"By the Holy Cross, Forester, thy speech is golden," said the King, laughing, "and I will follow thy wise counsel. The garb of a Monk will become me but ill. No matter! Let them fetch me a Friar's robe."

The impatient monarch was soon clothed in an Abbot's costume, and chose four Knights, who dressed themselves as Monks, to accompany him. Moreover, following another stratagem suggested by the Keeper, they harnessed their horses in such a manner as to convey the impression that they carried a load of treasure.

About a league from the Castle, the Keeper, who served as guide to the supposed Monks, approached the King and said—

"My Lord, look to the end of yonder glade; there you will see Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlett, the three Chiefs of the band."

"Good," said the King, gaily. And urging his horse forward, Richard made as though he would escape.

Robin Hood leapt on to the road, seized the animal's bridle, and compelled it to stop.

"A thousand pardons, Sir Abbot,"

said he; "pray tarry a while and receive my hearty welcome."

"Profane sinner," cried Richard, seeking to imitate the habitual language of the clergy. "Dost dare arrest the passage of a holy man on a sacred errand?"

"I am a yeoman of this Forest," replied Robin Hood, "and my companions and I live upon the proceeds of the chase and the generosity of pious members of Holy Church."

"Upon my word, thou art a daring rogue," answered the King, concealing a smile. "To dare tell me to my face that thou eatest my . . . the King's deer, and plunderest members of the Church. By St. Hubert! thou dost possess at least the merit of frankness."

"Frankness is the only resource of those who possess naught," returned Robin Hood. "But those who have revenues, lands, and gold and silver can pass them on, when they know not what to do with them. I believe, noble Abbot," continued Robin, in a mocking tone, "that you are one of the happy number of whom I speak. That is why I ask you to come to the aid of our modest wants, and of the misery of our poor friends and dependants. You too often forget, my brothers, that round about your rich dwellings there are homes lacking bread, although you possess more money than wants for it to satisfy."

"Perchance thou speakest truth, yeoman," replied the King, partly forgetting the religious character with which he was invested. "And the expression of loyal frankness which shines from thy face pleaseth me singularly. Thou hast an appearance of being more honest than thou art in reality. Natheless, for the sake of thy good appearance, and for love of Christian charity, I make thee a gift of all the money I possess at this moment—forty pieces of gold. I am sorry that it is no more, but the King, who hath been staying for several days at Nottingham Castle, as thou hast doubtless heard, hath almost entirely emptied my pockets. This money, however, is at thy service, for I like well thy fine face and the strong countenances of thy lusty comrades."

With these words, the King handed Robin Hood a little leathern bag containing forty pieces of gold.

"You are the paragon of Churchmen, Sir Abbot," said Robin, laughing; "and if



I had not made a vow to squeeze more or less every member of Holy Church, I should refuse to accept your generous offer. However, it shall not be said that you have suffered too cruelly on your way through Sherwood Forest. Your escort and horses may pass freely, and more, you must allow me to accept only twenty pieces of gold."

"Thou dost behave nobly, Forester," replied Richard, who appeared sensible of Robin's generosity; "and I shall give myself the pleasure of speaking of thee to our Sovereign. His Majesty knoweth somewhat concerning thee, for he told me to greet thee from him if I were so fortunate as to meet thee. I believe, betwixt ourselves be it said, that King Richard—who doth love bravery where'er he finds it—would not be sorry to give his thanks in person to the brave yeoman who helped him to open the Gates of Nottingham Castle, and to ask him why he and his valiant companions disappeared so soon after the battle."

"If some day I were happy enough to find myself in His Majesty's presence, I should not hesitate to reply to the latter question; but at present, Sir Abbot, let us speak of something else. I love King Richard well, for he is English in heart and soul, though he belongeth by ties of blood to a Norman family. All of us here, priests and laity, are the faithful servants of His Most Gracious Majesty, and if you will consent, Sir Abbot, we will drink in company to noble Richard's health. Sherwood Forest knoweth how to be freely hospitable when it receiveth Saxon hearts and generous Monks beneath the shade of its old trees."

"I accept thy kind invitation with pleasure, Robin Hood," replied the King; "and I am ready to follow thee wherever thou dost wish to conduct me."

"I thank you for your confidence, good Monk," said Robin, leading Richard's horse toward a path ending at the Trysting Tree.

Little John, Will Scarlett, and the four Knights disguised as Monks, followed the King, who was preceded by Robin Hood.

The little escort had hardly entered upon the path when a deer, startled by the noise, ran quickly across the road; but more alert than the poor animal, Robin's arrow pierced its side with deadly effect.

"Well hit! well hit!" cried the King, heartily.

"That is not a very wonderful shot, Sir Abbot," said Robin, looking at Richard in surprise. "All my men, without exception, can kill a deer like that, and my wife herself can draw a bow and accomplish acts of skill far superior to the feeble exploit which I have achieved before your eyes."

"Thy wife?" repeated the King, in questioning tone. "Thou hast a wife? By the Mass, I am anxious to make the acquaintance of the woman who shares the perils of thine adventurous life."

"My wife is not the only one of her sex, Sir Abbot, who prefers a faithful heart and a home in the wilderness, to a faithless love and the luxury of a town existence."

"I will introduce my wife to you, Sir Abbot," cried Will Scarlett, "and if thou dost not acknowledge that her beauty is worthy of a throne, thou must permit me to declare either that thou art blind or that thy taste is execrable."

"By St. Dunstan!" returned Richard. "the popular fancy is quite right in calling you the Merrie Men. You want for nothing here—lovely women, royal game, fresh verdure, and entire liberty."

"Yea! we be very happy folk, Sir," replied Robin, laughing.

The escort soon reached the green-sward, where a repast awaited the guests; and this repast, sumptuously furnished with fragrant venison, excited Richard Cœur-de-Lion's appetite by its mere appearance.

"By my mother's conscience!" he cried (let us hasten to say that the Lady Eleanor had so little conscience that it was sheer pleasantry to appeal to it), "here is a truly royal dinner!" Whereupon the King took his place at the board and ate with great enjoyment. Towards the end of the meal, Richard said to his host—

"Thou hast made me anxious to meet the beautiful women who people thy vast domain. Introduce them to me. I am curious to see if they are worthy, as thy red-headed companion assured me, to ornament the Court of the King of England."

Robin sent Will to find the beautiful woodland nymphs, and to tell his men to prepare the sports in which they engaged on days of rest.

"My men will endeavour to amuse you

a little, Sir Abbot," said Robin, again taking his place beside the King; "and you will see that there is naught really blameworthy in our pleasures and the wild fashion of our lives. And when you find yourself in the presence of good King Richard, I ask it as a favour that you will tell him that the Merrie Men of Sherwood are neither to be feared by brave Saxons, nor unkind to any who have compassion on the inevitable hardships of the rough life they lead."

"Rest assured, brave yeoman, His Majesty shall know of all that hath happened here, as surely as though he himself had partaken of thy repast in my stead."

"You, Sir, are the most gracious Abbot that I have ever met in all my life, and I am very glad to be able to treat you as a brother. Now be pleased to direct your attention to my archers. There is nothing to equal their skill, and, in order to amuse you, I am sure they will accomplish wonders."

Robin's men then began to draw the bow with such extraordinary steadiness of hand and aim, that the King complimented them with an expression of real surprise.

The exercise lasted about half an hour, when Will Scarlett reappeared, bringing with him Marian and Maude, arrayed in Amazon costumes of Lincoln green cloth, and each carrying a bow and quiver of arrows.

The King opened his eyes in astonishment, and gazed speechless at the charming faces that blushed beneath his gaze.

"Sir Abbot," said Robin, taking Marian by the hand, "allow me to present to you the Queen of my heart, my dearly loved wife."

"Thou mightest well add the Queen of thy Merrie Men, brave Robin," cried the King; "and you have every reason to be proud of inspiring a tender passion in such a charming creature. Dear Madam," continued the King, "allow me to salute you as the Queen of Sherwood Forest, and to render you the homage of a faithful subject."

So saying, the King knelt upon the ground, and taking Marian's white hand, touched it respectfully with his lips.

"Your courtesy is great, Sir Abbot," said Marian, modestly; "but I pray you remember that it doth but ill become a man of your holy character to bow thus before a woman. You should render to

God alone that token of humility and respect."

"That is a very moral rebuke for the wife of a simple forester," murmured the King, again taking up his position under the Trysting Tree.

"Sir Abbot, here is my wife," cried Will, leading Maude up to Richard.

The King looked at Maude, and said laughingly—

"This lovely lady is without doubt the one who would do honour to a King's palace."

"Yea, Sire," said Will.

"Well, my friend," replied Richard, "I share your opinion, and if you will allow me, I will implant a kiss upon the beautiful cheek of her you love."

William smiled, and the King, who took this smile for a reply in the affirmative, embraced the young woman gallantly.

"A word in your ear, Sir Abbot," said Will, approaching the King, who listened with complacency to the young man. "You are a man of taste," continued Will, "and you will never have anything to fear in Sherwood Forest. From this day forth I promise you a cordial reception every time a happy chance brings you amongst us."

"I thank you for your courtesy, good yeoman," said the King, gaily. "Oh! oh! but what more do I see?" cried Richard, with his eyes upon Will's sisters, who, accompanied by Lilas, appeared before him. "Truly, my lads, your dryads are real fairies." The King took Lilas's hand. "By our Lady!" he murmured, "I did not believe that so beautiful a woman as my sweet Berengaria existed; but, upon my soul, I am forced to confess that this child equals her in purity and beauty. My pretty one," said the King, pressing the little hand he held in his own, "thou hast chosen a very hard life, deprived of all the pleasures of thine age. Dost not fear, poor child, that the stormy winds of this Forest will destroy thy frail life, as they destroy young flowers?"

"My father," replied Lilas, gently, "the wind is tempered to the strength of the plants; it spareth the feeble ones. I am happy here; one who is dear to me lives in the old wood, and I know no sorrow by his side."

"Thou art right to acknowledge thy love if the man whom thou lovest is worthy of thee, my sweet child," returned Richard.



"He is worthy of even greater love than I give him, my father," replied Lilas. "Albeit, I love him as tenderly as can be."

Saying these words the girl blushed. Richard's big blue eyes were fixed upon her with such a burning look that, seized with an undefinable fear, she gently drew her hand away from the King's clasp, and sat down by Marian.

"I own to you, Master Robin," said the King, "that there is not a single Court in Europe that can boast of gathering around the throne so many young and beautiful women as we see around us. I have seen the women of many countries, and I have never met anything to compare with the sweet and tranquil beauty of Saxon women. Curse me, if any one of the fresh faces that meet my gaze be not worth an hundred women of the East or of any foreign race."

"I am pleased to hear you speak thus, Sir Abbot," said Robin. "You prove to me once more that pure English blood flows in your veins. I cannot presume to judge of so delicate a point, for I have never travelled, and know no lands beyond Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Natheless, I am strongly disposed to say with you that Saxon women are the most beautiful in all the world."

"They are certainly the most beautiful," cried Will, decidedly. "I have travelled over a great part of the Kingdom of France, and I can certify that I have not met with a single matron or maid who can compare with Maude. Maude is the pick of English beauty, that is my opinion."

"You have served as a soldier?" asked the King, looking at the young man attentively.

"Yea, Sir," replied Will, "I have served King Henry in Aquitaine and Poitou, at Harfleur, Evreux, Rouen, and in many other places."

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed the King, turning his head for fear that Will would end by recognising him. "Robin Hood," he continued, "your men are preparing to continue the games. I shall be very pleased to witness some fresh exercise of skill."

"It shall be as you wish, Sir. I will show you how I set about forming my archers' hands. Much," cried Robin, "place garlands of roses upon the wands."

Much executed the order given him,

and soon the top of the wand was seen above a circle formed by the flowers.

"Now, my lads," cried Robin, "take aim at the wand; he who misses his stroke will have to give me a good arrow with which he shall receive a blow. Attend, for, by Our Lady, I shall not spare the maladroit. It is well understood that I take part with you, and in case of unskilfulness, I submit to a like punishment."

Many Foresters missed their aim and received with good grace a sturdy blow. Robin Hood broke the wand in pieces; another was put up in its stead. Will and Little John missed their aim, and amid shouts of laughter from all the onlookers they received the reward of their awkwardness.

Robin had the last shot; but wishing to show the supposed Abbot that in such a case there was no distinction made between himself and his men, he purposely missed the wand.

"Oh, oh, Master!" cried an astonished yeoman, "you have missed the mark."

"'Tis true, i' faith, and I deserve the punishment. Little John, thou art the strongest of us all, and thou wilt know how to strike hard."

"I do not hold with it in the least," replied John; "the mission is a disagreeable one, for 'twould set me at variance with my right hand for ever."

"Very well, then, Will, I ask you."

"Thank you, Robin; I refuse entirely to do thee this kindness."

"I refuse too," said Much.

"I too," cried another man.

"And so do we all!" exclaimed the Foresters with one accord.

"All this is ridiculous childishness," said Robin, severely. "I did not hesitate to punish those who did wrong, you must do the like to me, and as severely. As not one of my men will lay his hand upon me, it is for thee, Sir Abbot, to settle the dispute. Here is my best arrow, and I pray you, Sir, to serve me as I served my unskilful archers."

"Nay! I dare not take it upon me to satisfy thee, my dear Robin Hood," cried the King, laughing, "for I have a heavy hand, and I hit hard."

"I am neither tender nor delicate, Sir Abbot; so be easy."

"Thou dost really wish it?" asked the King, baring his muscular arm. "Well, thou shalt have thy wish."

The blow was so vigorously applied that Robin fell to the ground, but he soon rose again.

"I confess before Heaven," said he, with smiling lips and a red face, "that you are the most powerful monk in all merry England. You have too much strength in your arm for a man who doth exercise a holy profession, and I would wager mine head (it is valued at four hundred gold crowns) that you know more about stretching a bow and wielding a cudgel than carrying a crozier."

"It may be so," cried the King, laughing; "and let us add likewise, an thou wilt—handling a sword, a spear, or a shield."

"Your conversation and manner reveal rather a man accustomed to the adventurous life of a soldier than a pious servant of Holy Church," returned Robin, examining the King attentively. "I should much like to know who you are, for strange thoughts have come into my head."

"Dismiss those thoughts, Robin Hood; and do not seek to discover whether or no I am the man I represent myself to be," replied the King, quickly.

The Knight, Sir Richard of the Plain, who had been absent since the morning, appeared at this moment in the midst of the group and approached Robin. Sir Richard trembled when he perceived the King, for Richard's face was well known to him. He looked at Robin, but the young man seemed completely ignorant of his guest's high rank.

"Do you know the name of him who wears the garb of an Abbot?" Sir Richard asked in a low voice.

"Nay," replied Robin; "but I think I discovered a few minutes ago that those russet locks and those large blue eyes could only belong to one man in England, to . . ."

"Richard Cœur-de-Lion, King of England," cried the Knight, involuntarily.

Robin Hood and Sir Richard fell upon their knees.

"I now recognise the noble countenance of my Sovereign," said the Outlaw Chief; "'tis our good King Richard of England. May God protect your gracious Majesty!" A benevolent smile played upon the King's lips. "Sire," continued Robin, without changing his humble attitude, "your Majesty knoweth who we be—Outlaws driven from the homes

of our fathers by unjust and cruel oppression. Poor and without shelter, we have found a refuge in the solitude of the woods. We have lived by the chase, on alms—exactd by force, no doubt, but without violence, and with the most engaging courtesy. These alms were given with good or bad grace; but we never received them before we were quite certain that he who refused to come to the help of our distress carried a Knight's ransom at the least in his wallet. Sire, I implore your Majesty's pardon for my companions and their Chief."

"Rise, Robin Hood," replied the King, kindly, "and tell me the reason why thou didst lend me the help of thy brave archers in the assault on the Castle of Nottingham."

"Sire," returned Robin Hood, who, while obeying the King's command, still held himself respectfully inclined before him, "your Majesty is the idol of all true English hearts. Your actions, so worthy of general respect, have won for you the gracious title of 'bravest of the brave,' 'the man of the lion's heart,' who, like a loyal Knight, triumphs personally over his enemies and extends his generous protection to the unfortunate. Prince John earned your Majesty's displeasure, and when I heard of my King's appearance before the walls of Nottingham Castle, I secretly placed myself under his orders. Your Majesty took the Castle which sheltered the rebel Prince, my task was accomplished, and I retired without saying anything, because the knowledge of having loyally served my King satisfied my inmost wishes."

"I thank thee cordially for thy frankness, Robin Hood," Richard replied; "and thine affection for me is very gratifying. Thou dost act and speak like an honest man. I am pleased, and bestow full and entire pardon on the Merrie Men of Sherwood Forest. Thou hast had it in thy power to do wrong, but thou hast not taken advantage of this dangerous power. Thou hast only levied courteous contributions upon rich Normans, and then only in order to supply the needs of thy band. I excuse thy faults—they were only natural in such an exceptional position; but, as the Forest laws have been broken, as Princes of the Church and noble Lords have been obliged to leave bribes out of



their immense treasures in thine hands, thy pardon needs be set down in writing so that thou mayest live henceforth in safety, free from all reproach and all pursuit. To-morrow, in the presence of my Knights, I will proclaim aloud that the ban of proscription, which hath placed thee below the meanest serf of my kingdom, is entirely removed. I restore to thee and to all those who have participated in thine adventurous career the rights and privileges of free men. I have said it, and I swear to keep my word by the help of Almighty God."

"Long live Richard Cœur-de-Lion!" cried the Outlaws with one voice.

"May the Blessed Virgin protect your Majesty for ever," said Robin Hood, in a tone of emotion, and kneeling upon one knee on the ground, he respectfully kissed the generous Monarch's hand.

After this token of gratitude, Robin rose, sounded his horn, and the Merrie Men, who had all been variously occupied, some in drawing the bow, others in wielding the quarterstaff, at once abandoned their respective occupations to group themselves in a circle around their young Chief.

"Brave comrades," said Robin, "kneel, all of you, upon the ground, and bare your heads; ye are in the presence of your legitimate sovereign, of the well-beloved Monarch of Merry England, of Richard Cœur-de-Lion. Do homage to our noble Master and Lord." The Outlaws obeyed Robin's command, and while the troop remained humbly bowed before Richard, Robin made known to them their sovereign's clemency. "And now," added the young man, "make the old Forest ring with your joyous hurrahs. A great day hath dawned for us, my lads; ye are free men by the grace of God and of noble Richard."

The Merrie Men did not need fresh encouragement to express their inward joy; they gave vent to such a formidable hurrah, it were easy to believe that the echo of it was heard two miles off from the Trysting Tree.

This noisy clamour stilled, Richard of England took up the thread of the conversation, and invited Robin and all his troop to accompany him to Nottingham Castle.

"Sire," replied Robin, "the flattering notice that your Majesty deigns to show me, fills my heart with unutterable joy. I belong body and soul to my Sovereign,

and if he will permit me, I will choose from among my men an hundred and forty archers who will humbly serve your most gracious Majesty with absolute devotion."

The King, as much flattered as surprised by the heroic Outlaw's humble demeanour in his presence, thanked Robin Hood cordially, and making him send his men back to their momentarily suspended games, took a cup from the table, filled it to the brim, drank it to the dregs, and said with an expression of friendly curiosity—

"And now, friend Robin, tell me, I prithee, who is that giant over yonder; for it is difficult otherwise to describe the huge lad whom Heaven hath likewise blessed with such an honest face. Upon my soul, I thought until to-day that I was more than ordinary tall, but I see now that if I stood beside that jolly dog, I should look but an innocent chicken. What breadth of limb, what vigour! The man is magnificently made!"

"He is likewise as good, Sire," replied Robin, "as his strength is enormous; he could stay the march of an army with his single arm, and yet he will listen to a touching story with the simple innocence of a child. The man who hath the honour to attract your Majesty's attention is my brother, my companion, my dearest friend. He hath a heart of gold, a heart as true as the steel of his invincible sword. He wieldeth the staff with such wonderful skill that he hath never once been beaten; moreover, he is the best archer in the county, and the finest lad in all the world."

"Truly, these be praises right pleasant to hear, Robin," returned the King, "for he who inspires them is worthy to be thy friend. I should like to speak with this honest yoeman. What is his name?"

"John Naylor, Sire; but we call him Little John on account of his small stature."

"By the Mass," cried the King, laughing, "a band of such Little Johns would greatly terrify those dogs of infidels. Ho there, fine tree of the forest, tower of Babylon, Little John, my lad, come to me; I would fain look at thee nearer."

John approached with bared head, and awaited with an air of quiet assurance for Richard's commands.

The King asked the young man several questions relating to the extraordinary



RICHARD CŒUR DE LION, KING OF ENGLAND





strength of his muscles, tried to wrestle with him, and was respectfully vanquished by his gigantic adversary. After this trial, the King took part in the games and exercises of the Merrie Men as naturally as though he had been one of their companions, and finally declared that it was long since he had spent such an enjoyable day.

That night the King of England slept under the protection of the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest, and the next day, after doing justice to an excellent breakfast, he prepared to take the road once more to Nottingham.

"My brave Robin," said the Monarch, "could you place at my disposal some clothes like those worn by your men?"

"Yea, Sire."

"Well, then, give me and my Knights costumes like thine own, and we will have a diverting scene upon our entry into Nottingham. Our men of office are alway extraordinarily active, whenever the presence of a superior puts them on their good behaviour, and I feel certain the good Reeve and his valiant soldiers will give us proofs of their invincible courage."

The King and his Knights donned the costumes chosen by Robin, and after a gallant kiss bestowed upon Marian, in honour of all the ladies, Richard, accompanied by Robin, Little John, Will Scarlett, Much, and a hundred and forty archers, gaily took the road to his lordly dwelling.

At the gates of Nottingham, Richard commanded his suite to give vent to a shout of victory.

This formidable hurrah brought the citizens to the thresholds of their respective houses, and at sight of a body of Merrie Men, armed to the teeth, they imagined that the King had been killed by the Outlaws, and that the robbers, whetted by their bloody victory, were going to descend upon the town and massacre all its inhabitants. Distracted with fear, the poor creatures rushed about in disorder, some into the most obscure recesses of their dwellings, others straight before them. Others pealed the bells, besought the aid of the town guard, and went to find the Reeve, who by an extraordinary miracle had completely disappeared.

The King's troops were about to make a dangerous attack upon the supposed Outlaws, when their Chiefs, little desirous

of entering upon a contest without knowing the cause of it, put a check upon their bellicose ardour.

"Behold our warriors," said Richard, with a sly look at the cowardly defenders of the town. "Meseemeth the citizens, as well as the soldiers, cling to life. The Reeve is absent, the leaders tremble; good Heavens, but these cowards deserve exemplary punishment."

The King had scarce arrived at this by no means flattering conclusion concerning the citizens of Nottingham, when his own personal body-guard, led by a Captain, left the Castle in all haste, in line of battle and with spears at rest.

"By St. Denis, my fine fellows joke not," cried the King, putting to his lips the horn that had been given him by Robin. Twice he sounded a call betokening the advance to the Captain of his Guards, and the latter, recognising the signal agreed upon by the Monarch, lowered his arms, and respectfully awaited the approach of his Sovereign.

The news of the return of Richard of England, triumphantly accompanied by the Prince of Outlaws, spread as quickly as the news of the approach of the Outlaws with murderous intent. The citizens, who had prudently retired into the recesses of their houses, sallied out again with pale faces, but with smiles upon their lips; and as soon as they learnt that Robin Hood and his band had won the King's favour, they pressed round the Merrie Men, complimenting this one, shaking the hand of that, vying with one another in proclaiming themselves the friends and protectors of them all. From the midst of the multitude cries of felicitation and joy arose, and one heard these words repeated on every side—"Glory to noble Robin Hood, glory to Robin Hood, the tender and true!"

The voices growing more and more emboldened, proclaimed the presence of the Outlaw Chief so loudly and enthusiastically, that Richard, tired of the increasing clamour, cried at last—

"By my crown and sceptre, meseemeth that thou art King here, Robin."

"Ah, Sire," replied the young man, with a bitter smile, "do not attach any importance or value to these tokens of apparent friendship; they are but the vague result of the gracious favour with which your Majesty doth overload the Outlaw. One word from King Richard



could change the admiring shouts which my presence here excites, into howls of hatred, and these very men would pass at once from praise to blame, from admiration to scorn."

"Thou speakest true, my dear Robin," laughed the King; "rogues are the same everywhere, and I have already proved the heartlessness of the citizens of Nottingham. When I came here with the intention of punishing Prince John, they greeted my return to England with a profound reserve. For them, might is right, and they did not know that with thy help it would be easy for me to capture the Castle and expel my brother. Now they show us the fair side of their ugly faces, and plaster us with their vile flattery. Let us leave the wretches, and think only of ourselves. I have promised thee, Robin, a noble reward for the services which thou hast rendered me. Put thy request; King Richard hath but one word, to which he ever holds, and he aye fulfils the promises he doth make."

"Sire," replied Robin, "your gracious Majesty hath made me happy beyond expression in renewing your generous offer of support. I accept it for myself, for my men, and for a Knight, who, disgraced by King Henry, hath been obliged to seek a refuge in Sherwood Forest. This Knight, Sire, is a warm-hearted man, the worthy father of a family, a brave Saxon, and if your Majesty will do me the honour to hearken to the history of Sir Richard of the Plain, I am sure you will grant the request I am about to make."

"We have given our kingly word to grant any favour which it may please thee to beg of us, friend Robin," replied Richard, affectionately. "Speak out fearlessly, and tell us by what chain of circumstances this Knight fell into disfavour with my father."

Robin hastened to obey the King's command, and recounted as briefly as possible the history of Sir Richard of the Plain.

"By our Lady," cried Richard, "this good Knight hath been cruelly treated, and thou hast acted nobly in coming to his aid. But it shall never be said, brave Robin Hood, that in this case again thou hast surpassed the King of England in large-heartedness and generosity. I will protect thy friend in my turn; bring him to our presence."

Robin called the Knight, who, with a

heart beating high with hope, presented himself respectfully before the Monarch.

"Sir Richard of the Plain," said the King, graciously, "thy valiant friend, Robin Hood, hath just told me of all the misfortunes that have occurred to thy family, and the dangers to which thou hast been exposed. In doing thee justice, I am happy to testify to the sincere admiration and profound esteem which his conduct inspires in me. I restore to thee possession of thy goods, and for one year thou shalt be freed of all imposts and taxes. Besides this, I annul the decree of banishment proclaimed against thee, in order that the remembrance of this act of injustice shall be entirely effaced both from thy memory and from that of thy fellow citizens. Return to thy Castle; letters of full and entire pardon shall be delivered to thee by our command. As for thee, Robin Hood, ask something more from him who feels that he can never repay his debt of gratitude, even after having granted all thy wishes."

"Sire," said the Knight, kneeling upon the ground, "how can I express the gratitude which fills my heart?"

"By telling me that thou art happy," the King replied gaily; "and by promising me never again to offend against members of Holy Church."

Sir Richard kissed the hand of the generous Monarch, and discreetly retired among the groups standing a short distance from the King.

"Well, brave archer," continued the Monarch, turning toward Robin Hood, "what dost desire of me?"

"Naught at present, Sire; later on, if your Majesty will permit me, I shall ask one last favour."

"It shall be granted thee. Now, let us return to the Castle. We have received generous hospitality in Sherwood Forest, and it is to be hoped that Nottingham Castle can furnish resources for a right royal feast. Thy men have an excellent mode of preparing venison, and the fresh air and fatigue of the march had singularly sharpened our appetites, so that we ate greedily."

"Your Majesty had the right to eat your fill," Robin laughingly replied, "considering that the game was your own property."

"Our property or that of the first hunter that comes along," the King returned gaily; "and if all other folk make out that the deer of Sherwood Forest belong

exclusively to us, there is a certain yeoman whom thou dost know very well, Robin, and three hundred of his companions forming a merry band, who reckon mightily little of the prerogative of the Crown."

Talking thus, Richard proceeded toward the Castle, and the enthusiastic acclamations of the populace followed the King of England and the famous Outlaw to the gates of the old fortress with their noisy clamour.

The generous Monarch fulfilled the promises he had made to Robin Hood the very same day; he signed an act annulling the ban of proscription, and restored to the young man possession of his rights and title to the wealth and dignities of the Huntingdon family.

The day after this happy event, Robin assembled his men in the Court-yard of the Castle, and announced to them the unlooked-for change in his fortunes. This news filled the hearts of the brave yeomen with sincere happiness; they loved their Chief devotedly, and with one accord they refused the liberty he wished to give them. It was decided forthwith that for the future the Merrie Men were to cease from levying contributions even on Normans and Churchmen, and that they should be fed and clothed afresh by their noble master Robin Hood, who had become the rich Earl of Huntingdon.

"My lads," added Robin, "since ye wish to live near me and to accompany me to London, if I be commanded to proceed thither by our well-beloved Sovereign, ye must swear to me never to reveal the situation of our cave to any one. Let us reserve this precious refuge in case of fresh misfortune."

The men loudly took the oath demanded by their Chief, and Robin urged them to make their preparations for departure without delay.

On March 30th, 1194, the eve of his departure for London, Richard held a council at Nottingham Castle, and amongst the many important matters that were then discussed was the establishment of Robin's right to the Earldom of Huntingdon. The King peremptorily announced his wish to restore to Robin Hood the property held by the Abbot of Ramsey, and Richard's councillors formally promised to carry out to his entire satisfaction the act of justice, which was to make amends to the noble Outlaw for the misfortunes he had so courageously borne.

## CHAPTER XIII

**B**EFORE leaving, perhaps for ever, the ancient Forest that had so long sheltered him, Robin felt such an intense regret for the past, and such apprehensions for the future, but little in keeping with the prospect which Richard's generosity had opened up for him, that he decided to await under the protecting shelter of his leafy home the definite results of the arrangements made by the King of England.

It was a lucky decision that kept him at Sherwood, for Richard's coronation, which took place at Winchester shortly after his return to London, so much absorbed his thoughts that all proceedings tending to restore the recognised but still unproclaimed rights of the young Earl of Huntingdon, were rendered inexpedient.

The coronation festivities ended, Richard departed for the Continent, to which he was summoned by a desire for vengeance upon Philip of France, and, relying on the promises of his Counsellors, he left the re-establishment of brave Robin Hood's fortunes to their care.

Baron Broughton (Abbot of Ramsey), who enjoyed the wealth of the Huntingdon family, set in motion all his influence and the resources of his immense fortune, to retard the execution of the decree made by Richard in favour of the true inheritor of the titles and domains of this rich Earldom. But all the time he was gathering to himself friends and protectors, the prudent Baron did not attempt openly to oppose the edict issued by Richard, contenting himself with asking for time, and loading the Chancellor with rich presents; and thus maintaining quiet possession of the patrimony he had usurped.

While Richard was fighting in Normandy, and the Abbot of Ramsey gradually winning over the entire Council to his cause, Robin Hood confidently awaited the message that would inform him of his having entered into possession of his father's estates.

Eleven months of fruitless waiting lessened the young man's patience. He plucked up courage, and trusting in the kindness shown him by the King during his sojourn at Nottingham, he addressed a request to Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, Keeper of the Great Seal of England, and Lord Chief Justice of



the Kingdom. Robin Hood's request reached its destination. The Archbishop was aware of it. But if this very just demand was not openly repulsed, it remained unanswered, and was treated as though it had never been made.

The ill-will of those who had to do with restoring Robin Hood's possessions, manifested itself in this inactivity, and it was not difficult for the young man to guess that an underhand struggle was going on against him. Unluckily, the Abbot of Ramsey, who had become Baron of Broughton, was too strong an adversary to make it possible for Robin to revenge himself upon him in Richard's absence. He therefore decided to shut his eyes to the injustice of which he was a victim, and prudently to await King Richard's return.

Acting on this decision, Robin Hood sent a second message to the Lord Chief Justice. He confessed to great dissatisfaction at the evident protection accorded to the Abbot of Ramsey, and declared that, hoping for prompt justice on Richard's return to England, he would again place himself at the head of his men, and continue to live in Sherwood Forest as he had done before.

Hubert Walter apparently paid no attention to Robin's second message; but, while taking strong measures to restore peace and order throughout England, while destroying numerous bands of men who had gathered together in different parts of the kingdom, the Archbishop left Richard's friend and his Merrie Men in peace.

Four years went by in the false calm that precedes the storm of revolutionary disorders. One morning, the news of Richard's death fell upon the kingdom of England like a thunderbolt, and filled all hearts with fear.

The accession to the throne of Prince John, who seemed deliberately to have undertaken the task of making himself universally hated, was the signal for a series of crimes and acts of reckless violence.

During this disastrous period, the Abbot of Ramsey, accompanied by a numerous suite, passed through Sherwood Forest on his way to York, and was waylaid by Robin. The Abbot and his escort were taken prisoners, and could only obtain their freedom at the cost of a considerable ransom. He paid, storming and promising himself a fierce revenge the while; and this revenge was not long delayed.

The Abbot of Ramsey addressed himself to the King, and John, who at that time greatly needed the support of the nobles, lent an ear to the Abbot's complaint, and forthwith sent a hundred men under Sir William de Grey, the eldest brother of John de Grey, the King's favourite, in pursuit of Robin Hood, with orders to cut the whole band to pieces.

Sir William de Grey, who was a Norman, hated the Saxons, and moved by this feeling of hatred he swore ere long to lay the head of his insolent adversary at the feet of the Abbot of Ramsey.

The unexpected arrival of a company of soldiers of warlike appearance and clad in coats of mail, caused a panic in the little town of Nottingham; but when it was understood that their destination was the Forest of Sherwood, and their purpose the extermination of Robin's band, terror gave place to discontent, and some of the Outlaws' friends hastened to warn them of the fate in store for them. Robin received the news as a man on his guard, who awaits the reprisals of a deeply injured enemy, and he did not doubt for an instant that the Abbot of Ramsey had lent his assistance to this sudden expedition. Robin assembled his men, therefore, and prepared to offer a stout resistance to the Norman attack. He at once sent out a skilful archer, disguised as a peasant, who was to meet the enemy and offer to conduct them to the tree known throughout the county as the rallying-point of the band of Merrie Men.

This simple trick, which had already rendered Robin such good service, again succeeded completely, and Sir William de Grey accepted the offices of Robin's spy without hesitation.

The genial Forester then put himself at the head of the troop and took them through bushes, thorns, and thickets for three hours, without noticing, apparently, that their coats of mail rendered the progress of the unhappy soldiers very difficult. Then, when they were overcome by the crushing weight of their armour and spent with fatigue, the guide led them, not to the Trysting Tree, but to the middle of a vast clearing surrounded by elms, beeches, and century-old oaks. On this spot, where the turf was as fresh and as green as the lawn before a country house, was gathered, some sitting, some standing, the entire band of Merrie Men.

The sight of the enemy, to all appearances disarmed, revived the soldiers' spirits. Without giving a thought to their guide, who had slipped into the ranks of the Outlaws, they uttered a shout of triumph and threw themselves upon the Foresters. To the great surprise of the Normans the Merrie Men hardly quitted the listless attitude they had taken up, and almost without a change of position, they raised their immense cudgels above their heads, whirling them round and round with shouts of laughter.

Exasperated by this derisive reception, the soldiers rushed confusedly, sword in hand, upon the Foresters, who, without manifesting the slightest emotion, knocked down the threatening weapons with lusty blows of their cudgels; then, with dazzling rapidity, they dealt a shower of deadly blows upon the heads and shoulders of the Normans. The clatter of the coats of mail and helmets mingled with the cries of the terrified soldiers and the shouts of the Foresters, who did not appear to be defending their lives, but merely exercising their skill upon inanimate bodies.

Sir William de Grey, who was in command of the soldiers, saw with rage in his heart, the best of his troop falling around him, and he cursed the folly that had made him load his men with such heavy accoutrements. In a combat with men of such superior strength, and where the victory was so uncertain, bodily skill and agility were the first elements of success, and the Normans could hardly move without an effort.

Terrified at the probable result of a total defeat, the Knight called a truce, and thanks to Robin's generosity, he was able to take back the remnants of his troop to Nottingham.

It is needless to add that the grateful Knight promised himself secretly to recommence the attack on the following day with men more lightly equipped than the Normans he had brought from London.

Robin Hood, who had guessed Sir William's hostile intentions, arranged his men in order of battle on the same spot on which the combat of the previous day had taken place, and awaited calmly the appearance of the soldiers, who had been met some two miles from the Trysting Tree by one of the Foresters sent as scouts to different parts of the Forest in the neighbourhood of Nottingham.

This time the Normans were clad in the

light garb of archers, and armed with bows and arrows, small swords, and bucklers.

Robin Hood and his men had been at their posts for about an hour, and the soldiers had not yet appeared. The young man began to think his enemies had changed their minds, when an archer, who had been posted as sentinel, ran up in all haste to announce that the Normans (who had lost their way) were now marching directly upon the Trysting Tree, where, by Robin's orders, the women had assembled.

This news struck Robin with a fatal presentiment. He turned pale, and said to his men—

"Let us intercept the Norman dogs; they must be stopped on their way. Woe to them and to us if they get near our women!"

The Foresters rushed as one man to the road taken by the soldiers in order to bar their way or to reach the Trysting Tree before them. But the soldiers had advanced too far for the Merrie Men either to stop them or even to be in time to prevent a terrible disaster. The manners, or rather the want of manners, of this lawless period, made Robin and his companions fear cruel retaliation upon the group of completely isolated women.

The Normans soon reached the Trysting Tree. At sight of them the women rose in terror, uttering cries of anguish, and fled distractedly in every direction open to them. In the weak and forlorn position of their terrified wives, Sir William saw at a glance a means of satisfying his hatred against the Saxons; he resolved to seize them, and by their deaths to avenge the ill success of his first attack upon Robin Hood.

At their Chief's command, the soldiers halted, and for a second Sir William followed with his eyes the tumultuous movements of the poor distracted women. One of them ran forward, and her companions endeavoured to join her, and to protect her flight. This evident solicitude conveyed to the Norman the superior position of her who headed the retreat; he also considered that it would be according to the rules of war to strike her first, and seizing his bow, he fixed an arrow to it, and coolly took aim. The Knight was a good marksman; the unhappy woman, struck between the shoulders, fell bleeding in the midst of her companions, who, without a thought



of their own safety, knelt around her, uttering piercing cries.

A man had seen the miserable Norman's murderous action, and hoping to arrest the fatal stroke, he took aim at the Knight. His arrow reached its mark, but too late, for Sir William had shot Marian before he met his own death at the hand of Robin Hood.

"Lady Marian is wounded—mortally wounded!"

The terrible news flew from mouth to mouth; it brought tears to the eyes of all the Saxons, who dearly loved their young Queen. As for Robin, he was mad with grief; he did not speak, he did not weep, but he fought. Little John and he leapt like tigers thirsting for blood upon the Normans, and scattered death through their ranks without uttering a cry, without even opening their livid lips. Their active arms seemed endowed with superhuman strength; they avenged Marian, and they avenged her cruelly.

The bloody battle lasted for two hours; the Normans were cut to pieces, and shown no grace or mercy. One soldier alone escaped, and went to tell Sir William de Grey's brother of the fatal result of the expedition.

Marian had been removed to a clearing some distance from the scene of the combat, and Robin found Maude there, weeping as she vainly tried to staunch the blood which gushed from a frightful wound.

Robin knelt beside Marian, his heart torn with anguish; he could neither speak nor move, and felt as though he must choke. At Robin's approach Marian had opened her eyes and looked tenderly at him. "Thou art not wounded, my dear?" she asked, in a weak voice, after a moment's mute contemplation.

"Nay, nay," murmured Robin between his clenched teeth.

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" added Marian, smiling. "I have prayed to Our Dear Lady for thee, and she hath heard my prayer. Is this terrible combat over, dear Robin?"

"Yea, sweet Marian, our enemies have disappeared; they will never come back again. But let me speak of thee, think of thee; thou art . . . I . . . Holy Mother of God! This grief is more than I can bear."

"Come, come, courage, my well-beloved Robin; lift up thy head, look at me," said Marian, still trying to smile. "My wound is not deep, it will soon be cured;

the arrow hath been withdrawn. Thou knowest well, my dear, that if there were anything to fear, I should be the first to perceive that mine hour was come. . . . Look, look at me, Robin dear."

As she spoke, Marian tried to draw Robin's head towards her; but her last strength was spent in the effort, and when the young man raised his weeping eyes to her, she had fainted.

Marian soon came to herself, and after having sweetly consoled her husband, she expressed a wish to rest a little, and soon fell into a profound slumber.

As soon as Marian was asleep upon the mossy bed in the shade of the trees, that had been prepared for her by her companions, Robin went to inquire into the condition of his band. He found John, Will Scarlett, and Much occupied in tending the wounded and burying the dead. The number of the wounded was very inconsiderable, for it resolved itself into half a score of men seriously hurt, and there was not a single death to deplore amongst the Outlaws. As for the Normans, we know that they no longer existed, and several large ditches were dug in the glade to serve as their sepulchre.

On awaking after three hours' deep sleep, Marian found her husband beside her, and the angelic creature, still wishing to give some consoling hope to him she loved so dearly, began softly to say that she felt no weakness at all, and would soon be well.

Marian was suffering, she felt a deathly depression creeping over her, and she knew there was no hope; but Robin's anguish wrung her heart, and she sought to soften, as much as lay in her power, the fatal blow which must soon be dealt him.

Next morning she was worse, inflammation had set in in the wound, and all hope of recovery faded even from Robin's heart.

"Dear Robin," said Marian, laying her burning hands in those of her husband, "my last hour approaches; the hour of our separation will be cruel, but not insupportable to such as have faith in the mercy and goodness of Almighty God."

"Oh, Marian, my beloved Marian!" cried Robin, breaking into sobs, "hath the Holy Virgin abandoned us, that she can permit this desolation of our hearts? I will die at thy death, Marian, for it will be impossible to live without thee."

"Religion and duty will be the support

of thy weakness, my Robin," replied the young wife, tenderly. "Thou wilt resign thyself to bear the sorrow that overwhelms us, because it hath been imposed on thee as a Heavenly decree; and thou wilt live, if not happy, at least calm and strong, amidst the men whose happiness depends on thy life. I am going to leave thee, but, ere I close mine eyes to the light of day, let me tell thee how much I have loved thee, how much I do love thee. If the gratitude that fills all my being could be clothed in visible form, thou wouldst comprehend the strength and the extent of a feeling that hath no equal but my love. I have loved thee, Robin, with the confident surrender of a devoted heart; I have consecrated my life to thee, only asking of God the one gift of pleasing thee."

"And God hath granted thee that gift, dear Marian," said Robin, trying to moderate the violence of his grief; "for I can tell thee truly that thou alone hast filled my heart, that whether at my side or far from me, thou hast ever been my only hope and sweetest consolation."

"If Heaven had permitted us to grow old together side by side, dear Robin," replied Marian; "if a long succession of happy days had been granted to us, the separation would have been still more cruel, for then thou wouldst have had less strength to support the crushing sorrow. But we are both young, and I leave thee alone at a time of life when solitude is crowned by remembrance, perhaps even by hope. . . . Take me in thine arms, dear Robin, so . . . let me rest my head against thine. I would whisper my last words in thine ear. I would have my soul take its flight lightly and happily. I would breathe my last sigh upon thy heart."

"Beloved Marian, speak not so," cried Robin, in heartrending tones. "I cannot bear to hear that fatal word 'separation' upon thy lips. Oh, Holy Mother of God! Holy Protectress of the afflicted! Thou who hast ever granted my humble prayers! Grant me the life of her whom I love! Grant me the life of my wife, I pray thee, I beseech thee with clasped hands and on bended knees!"

And Robin, with his face bathed in tears, raised supplicating hands to Heaven.

"Thou dost address a vain prayer to the Divine Mother of the Sorrows of Mankind, sweetheart," said Marian, laying

her pale face against Robin's shoulder. "My days, or rather mine hours, are numbered. God hath sent me a dream to warn me."

"A dream! What dost say, dear child?"

"Yea, a dream; listen to me. I saw thee, surrounded by thy Merrie Men, in a vast clearing of Sherwood Forest. Thou wast evidently giving a feast to thy brave comrades, for the trees of the old wood were twined with garlands of roses, and purple streamers waved merrily upon the perfumed breath of the breeze. I was seated by thee; I held one of thy hands clasped in mine, and my heart was full of unutterable joy, when a stranger, with a pale face and black garments, appeared before us, and beckoned to me with his hand to follow him. I arose in spite of myself, and, still in spite of myself, I obeyed the dark stranger's summons. Natheless, before leaving thee I questioned thee with a look, for my lips could not even give vent to a sigh from my anguished bosom. Thy calm and smiling looks met mine. I directed thine attention to the stranger; thou didst turn thy head toward him and didst smile again. I made thee understand that he was leading me far away from thee. A slight pallor spread over thy face, but the smile did not leave thy lips. I was desperate, a convulsive trembling seized my limbs, and I began to sob with my head buried in my hands.

"The stranger still led me on. When we found ourselves a short distance from the clearing, a veiled woman appeared before me; the stranger stepped back, and this woman, raising the veil that hid her features from me, disclosed the sweet face of my mother. I uttered a cry, and trembling with wonder and fear, I held out my arms to her.

"'Dear child,' said she, in a tender and melodious voice, 'weep not, submit with the resignation of a Christian soul to the common destiny of all mortals. Die in peace, and leave without sorrow a world that hath only vain pleasures and passing joys to offer thee. There exists beyond this earth an abode of infinite bliss. Come and dwell there with me. But ere thou follow me, look!' Uttering these words my mother passed her hand, white and cold as marble, across my forehead. At this touch the veil fell from mine eyes—till then obscured by tears—and I saw around me a resplendent circle of maidens



of supernatural beauty and with a divine smile upon their fresh and shining faces. They did not speak, but they looked at me, and seemed to convey to me how happy I should feel in coming to augment their numbers.

"While I was admiring my future companions, my mother leant toward me, and said tenderly, 'Dear child of my heart, look, look again.'

"I obeyed my mother's tender injunction. All around me was spread a vast garden of sweet-smelling flowers, trees laden with fruit—crimson apples and golden-tinted pears—bent their branches to the thick grass, which was all enamelled with the blossoms of the white Easter daisies. The air was full of a sweet perfume, and a multitude of many-coloured birds fluttered and sang in the balmy air. I was enchanted. My heart, which late was full of grief, gradually lightened, and my mother, smiling at my happiness, said to me again with an expression of caressing tenderness, 'Look, dear child, look!'

"I heard the sound of light footsteps behind me. The sound was scarce audible, yet it seemed like music in mine ears, and without understanding the feeling that redoubled the beating of my heart, I turned round.

"Oh! then, Robin, my joy was complete, for thou wast running down the garden path; thou wast running to me with shining eyes and open arms. 'Robin! Robin!' I cried, trying to run to thee. My mother held me back. 'He will come,' she said. 'He comes—here he is.' And taking both our hands she joined them together, kissed me on the brow, and said, 'My children, you are here where joy is everlasting, where love is never ending; you are in the abode of the elect—be happy!'

"The end of the dream escapes my memory, dear Robin," continued Marian, after a short silence. "I awoke, and I understood that Heaven had sent me a warning and a hope. I must leave thee, doubtless for many years, but not for ever; God will re-unite us in the blissful eternity of the next world."

"Dear, dear Marian!"

"My beloved," continued the young wife, "I feel that my strength is exhausted. Let me rest my head upon thy heart—entwine thine arms around me, and like a tired child that falls asleep upon its mother's bosom, will I sleep my last sleep."

Robin embraced the dying woman feverishly, while his burning tears fell upon her brow.

"God bless thee, my beloved," repeated Marian in a more and more feeble voice. "God bless thee in the present and in the future. May He extend His Divine mercy over thee and over all whom thou dost love. All grows dark about me, and yet I would fain see thee smile once more. I would fain read in thine eyes how dear I am to thee. Robin, I hear my mother's voice. She calls me! she calls me! Farewell!"

"Marian! Marian!" cried Robin, falling on his knees beside his young wife's couch. "Speak to me! speak to me! I cannot let thee die! No, I cannot! Almighty God, come to my aid! Holy Virgin, take pity on us!"

"Dear Robin," murmured Marian, "I wish to be buried 'neath the Trysting Tree. . . . I want my grave to be covered with flowers. . . ."

"Yea, dearest Marian—yea, my sweet angel, thou shalt sleep beneath a carpet of balmy verdure, and when my last hour is come, I swear it by all I hold sacred, I will demand a place beside thee from him who closes mine eyes. . . ."

"I thank thee, my beloved. My heart's last beat is for thee, and I die happy, for I die in thine arms. . . . Good-bye, good——"

A sigh and a kiss fell from Marian's lips; her hands feebly clasped Robin's neck, around which they were entwined, then she grew quite still.

Robin remained bending over her sweet face for a long time. For long he hoped to see the closed eyes open again; for long he waited for a word from the pale lips, a tremble from that dear form; but alas! he waited in vain. Marian was dead!

"Holy Mother of God!" cried Robin, laying the motionless body of the poor girl upon the bed, "she is gone; gone for ever! my beloved, my only joy, my wife!"

And, maddened with grief, the unhappy man rushed from the spot crying wildly, "Marian is dead! Marian is dead!"

## CHAPTER XIV

ROBIN HOOD religiously performed his wife's last wishes. A grave was dug beneath the Trysting Tree, and the

mortal remains of the angelic creature who had been the guide and consolation of his life, were interred beneath a bed of flowers. The maidens of the County hastened to attend the funeral ceremony, strewed Marian's tomb with roses, and mingled their tears with poor Robin's sobs.

Allan and Christabel, informed by messenger of the sad occurrence, arrived early in the day; they were both in despair, and bitterly bewailed the irreparable loss of a well-beloved sister.

When all was over, and Marian's body had disappeared from sight, Robin Hood, who had presided over the heartrending details of the burial, gave a piercing cry, trembled from head to foot like a man wounded full in the breast by a murderous arrow, and without listening to Allan, without answering Christabel, who was frightened by his fierce despair, he escaped from their hands, and disappeared into the wood. Poor Robin wished to be alone with his grief, alone with God.

Time, which calms and softens the greatest griefs, had no such effect upon the open wound in Robin's heart. He wept ceaselessly, he mourned continuously, the wife whose sweet face had brightened their woodland home, who had found happiness in his love, who had been the only joy of his life.

Life in the Forest soon became insupportable to the young man, and he retired to Barnsdale Hall. But there, the distressing memory of the past was livelier than ever, and Robin Hood fell into a gloomy apathy that numbed all his moral faculties. He seemed to be alive neither in mind, spirit, nor memory.

This splenetic sorrow, if it may be so described, threw a shadow of the deepest melancholy over the band of Merrie Men. The grief of their young leader had quenched the light of their mirth, and they wandered through the old Forest like lost spirits. No longer did Friar Tuck's loud laugh echo through the greenwood; no longer was heard the sound of the nimble quarter-staves striking against each other with vigour and skill, amidst a chorus of bravos. Arrows remained idle within their quivers, and the butts were deserted.

Want of sleep and a distaste for food wrought a visible change in Robin's features; he grew pale, his eyes were encircled by dark rings, a dry cough shook his frame, while a slow fever

finished the work commenced by sorrow. Little John, who silently watched this cruel transformation, at last succeeded in making Robin understand that he must not only leave Barnsdale, but even Yorkshire, and seek to assuage his grief in the distractions of travel. After an hour's resistance, Robin had taken Little John's sage advice, and before leaving his companions, he had placed them under the command of his excellent friend.

In order to run no risks of being recognised, Robin dressed himself as a peasant, and in this simple garb he arrived at Scarborough. Here he stopped to rest at the door of a small hut occupied by the widow of a fisherman, and claimed her hospitality. The good dame gave our hero a kindly welcome, and as she served him with food, she related to him all the little sorrows of her life, adding that she owned a boat manned by three men, whose support pressed heavily on her, although they were insufficient in numbers to row the boat to shore when it was fully laden with a full catch of fish.

Eager to kill time in any way whatever, Robin Hood offered, for a small wage, to complete the number of boatmen, and the peasant woman, much taken with her guest's kindly disposition, gladly accepted the offer of his services.

"What are you called, fair lad?" asked the woman, when the arrangements for Robin's installation in the hut were complete.

"I am called Simon of Lee, good dame," replied Robin Hood.

"Well, then, Simon of Lee, to-morrow you will begin your work; and if the trade suits you, we shall long live together."

Early next day, Robin Hood embarked with his new companions, but it must be owned that, despite his will, Robin, who was ignorant of the most elementary details of the work, was of no use whatever to the experienced fishermen. Luckily for our friend, he had not to deal with evil comrades, and, instead of grumbling at his stupidity, they only laughed at the idea of his bringing with him his bow and arrows.

"If I had these fellows in Sherwood Forest," thought Robin, "they would not be so ready to laugh at my expense; but there—every one to his own trade. I certainly am not their match in the one they follow."

After loading up the boat to the gunwale with fish, the men unfurled the sails



and made for the jetty. As they sped along, they saw a little French corvette making for them. The corvette did not appear to have many men on board, but none the less the fishermen seemed terrified at her approach, and cried out that they were lost.

"Lost, and wherefore?" questioned Robin.

"Wherefore? Simpleton that thou art!" returned one of the fishermen. "Because the corvette is manned by the enemies of our nation; because we are at war with them; because, an they board us, they will take us prisoners."

"I trust indeed that they will never do that," replied Robin; "we will e'en try to defend ourselves."

"What defence can we offer? They are fifteen, we are three."

"Then you do not count me, my man?" asked Robin.

"Nay, my lad; thy hands have never been blistered by handling oars. Thou art no sailor, and shouldst thou chance to fall into the water, there would be one fool the less upon the earth. Nay, never take offence, thou art a pretty fellow, I bear thee no ill will; but thou art not worth thy keep."

A half smile hovered on Robin's lips.

"I am not very sensitive," said he; "however, I will prove to you that I am some good in the presence of danger. My bow and arrows will help us out of this difficulty. Bind me to the mast, for my hand must be sure; then let the corvette come within range."

The fishermen obeyed; Robin was firmly lashed to the mainmast, where he waited with bended bow.

As the corvette drew nearer, Robin took aim at a man standing in the bows, and sent him rolling on the deck with an arrow through his throat. A second sailor met a like fate. The fishermen, overwhelmed with wonder and delight, uttered a shout of triumph, and the foremost among them pointed out to Robin the commander of the corvette. Robin killed him as quickly as he had killed the others. The two vessels placed themselves side by side. There were only ten men left upon the corvette, and soon Robin had reduced the numbers of the unhappy Frenchmen to three. As soon as the fishermen perceived that only three men were left alive on board the boat, they determined to seize her, and this was made still easier because the Frenchmen,

seeing that all opposition was dangerous and useless, had laid down their arms and surrendered at discretion. The sailors were given their lives, and allowed to return to France on board a fishing smack.

The French corvette was a fine prize, for she was carrying a large sum of money to the King of France, twelve thousand silver pieces.

Needless to add, that, in taking possession of this unlooked-for treasure, the gallant sailors made excuses to him at whom they had been poking fun so short a time before; then, with heartfelt disinterestedness, they declared that the whole prize belonged to Robin, because he had won the victory by his skill and bravery.

"Good friends," said Robin, "the right of settling this question is mine alone, and thus will I arrange matters—half the corvette and her contents is to be the property of the poor widow to whom this boat belongs, and the rest will be divided betwixt the three of you."

"Nay, nay," said the men; "we will not allow thee to deprive thyself of the wealth thou hast acquired without our aid. The vessel doth belong to thee, and if thou wilt, we will be thy servants."

"I thank you, good lads," returned Robin; "but I cannot accept this testimony of your devotion. The division of the prize is to be according to my wishes, and I will employ the twelve thousand pieces in building for you and the poor inhabitants of the village of Scarborough healthier houses than you possess at present."

The fishermen tried, but in vain, to change Robin's plans. They tried to persuade him that in giving a quarter of the twelve thousand pieces to the widow, to the poor, and to themselves, he would still be acting very generously. But Robin would not listen to a word, and ended by imposing silence on his honest companions.

Robin Hood stayed for several weeks with the good people who had been made so happy by his generosity. Then one morning, tired of the sea, hungering to see the old woods and his dear companions once more, he called the fishermen together and announced his departure to them.

"My good friends," said Robin, "I leave you with a heart full of gratitude for all the care and kindness ye have lavished upon me. Probably we shall never meet again; but I hope that ye will preserve

a pleasant memory of him who hath been your guest, of your friend Robin Hood."

Before the wonderstruck fishermen had recovered their power of speech, Robin Hood had disappeared. To this day the little bay, upon whose shores stood the hut which sheltered the noble Outlaw, bears the name of Robin Hood's bay.

It was in the early hours of a beautiful June morning that Robin Hood reached the confines of Barnsdale Forest. With a spirit stirred by deep emotion he entered a narrow path, where often, alas! the dear creature, whose absence he must ever mourn, had awaited him with merry heart and smiling lips. After some moments' silent contemplation of the spots which bore witness to his lost happiness, Robin breathed more freely. He lived again in the past, and the memory of Marian stole lightly and sweetly like a perfumed vapour along the dim alleys, on the flowery meads, and into the glades shaded from the sun's rays by the foliage of the old oaks. Robin Hood followed the beloved shadow, with it he penetrated into the thick groves, in its steps he descended into the vales, and, still accompanied by the sweet vision, he arrived at the cross-road where the greater part of the Merrie Men were usually to be found.

To-day, however, the large open space was empty. Robin raised his hunting-horn to his lips and made the old wood resound with a vigorous call. A cry, or rather a sort of clamour, answered the notes of the horn; the branches of the surrounding trees were abruptly pushed aside, and Will Scarlett, followed by the whole band, threw himself upon Robin Hood with open arms.

"Robin, my dear, dear Robin," murmured Will in a broken voice, "so thou art returned at last, the Lord be praised! We have awaited thee with much impatience, have we not, Little John?"

"Yea, 'tis so indeed," replied John, whose eyes were sadly contemplating the traveller's pale face; "and Robin hath pitied our anguish and anxiety, since he is come back to us."

"Yea, good John, and I trust never to leave thee again."

John took Robin Hood's hand and wrung it with a violence so full of tenderness, that he had not the heart to complain of the pain which the too ardent pressure caused him.

"Be welcome among us!" cried the

Foresters, joyously; "be welcome a thousand times!"

The transports of delight induced by his presence shed a refreshing balm upon our hero's incurable heart wound. He felt that he must no longer give himself up to his grief, and leave helpless the brave men who had attached themselves to his evil fortunes.

This courageous resolution caused the blood to mount to poor Robin's face. His heart, alas! revolted against his will; but the latter was the stronger, and after addressing a mental farewell to Maid Marian's memory, he held out his hand to his faithful followers, saying in a strong, calm voice, "Henceforth, dear friends, ye will have in me your friend, your guide, your chief, Robin Hood the Outlaw, your captain, Robin Hood!"

"Hurrah!" cried the Foresters, throwing their bonnets in the air; "hurrah! hurrah!"

"Be my Merrie Men once more," said Robin, "and let happiness once more reign supreme here. To-day we will rest, to-morrow the chase, and let the Normans beware!"

Robin Hood's new exploits soon became the subject of men's talk through the length and breadth of England, and the rich Lords of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire contributed to the needs of the poor and to the support of the band.

Long years slipped by without bringing any change in the condition of the Outlaws. But before closing this book, we must acquaint our readers with the fate of some of our characters.

Sir Guy Gamwell and his wife died at very advanced ages, leaving their sons at Barnsdale Hall, to which they had retired on ceasing to form part of Robin Hood's band.

Will Scarlett had followed his brothers' example; he lived in a charming house with his dear Maude, already the mother of several children, and still as tenderly loved by her husband as in the first days of their union. Much and Barbara settled down near Maude; but Little John, who had had the misfortune to lose Winifred, having no reason to desert the Forest, remained faithful to Robin's commands. Besides, let us hasten to add, John loved Robin too dearly to have ever thought for a single moment of leaving him, and the two companions lived side by side, thoroughly convinced



that nothing but death would have the power to separate them.

Let us not forget to mention good Tuck, the pious chaplain who had consecrated so many marriages. Tuck remained faithful to Robin; he was still the spiritual adviser of the band, and he had lost none of his remarkable qualities; he was still the dignified drunken monk, noisy and boastful.

Halbert Lindsay, Maude's foster-brother, appointed Warden of Nottingham Castle by Richard Cœur-de-Lion, fulfilled the duties of his post so well that he succeeded in keeping it. Hal's wife, pretty Grace May, retained her charms in spite of passing years, and her little Maude promised to be the living image of her mother later on.

Sir Richard of the Plain lived quietly and happily with his wife and two children, Herbert and Lilas. The meanest Saxon preserved an affection and gratitude for Robin Hood which would only end with life; and there was merrymaking in the Castle whenever the gallant Outlaw, drawn by the magnet of affection, came there with Little John to rest from his fatigues.

Shortly after signing Magna Carta, King John, after a series of monstrous actions, started personally in pursuit of the young King of Scotland, who fled before him, and marched towards Nottingham, scattering desolation and terror in his path. John was accompanied by several generals whose exploits had earned for them pithy surnames, such as Jaleo the Ruthless, Mauléon the Bloody-Minded, Walter Much the Murderer, Sottim the Cruel, and Godeschal of the Iron Heart. These wretches were the chiefs of a band of foreign mercenaries, and their footsteps were marked by rape, fire, and death. The news of the approach of this robber band fell like a funeral knell upon the ears of the terrified populace, who fled in dismay, leaving their homes at the mercy of the Normans.

Robin Hood heard of the odious conduct of the soldiers, and resolved thereupon to inflict upon them the same tortures to which they forced their unlucky victims to submit.

The Foresters responded to their leader's appeal with an enthusiasm which would have made King John's men tremble, for all the old hatred of the conquered for their conquerors, of Saxon for Norman, remained unappeased.

The band prepared for battle; Robin Hood awaited his opportunity.

In approaching Sherwood Forest, the Norman chiefs sent a small body of scouts in advance, and when the greater part of the army penetrated into the wood, they saw, hanging motionless from the branches of trees along the roadside, or expiring in the dust, the men whose return they had vainly looked for. This terrifying spectacle chilled some of their warlike ardour; but as they were in large numbers, they continued their march. Robin could not openly attack a whole army; he could only hope to succeed by stratagem; and he therefore skilfully turned to advantage the agility and inimitable dexterity of his men. He harassed the soldiers, killing them with arrows that came they knew not whence; he pursued them, slaughtering the stragglers, and pitilessly massacring all those who had the ill-luck to fall into his hands. A general terror paralysed the movements of the army; it had quite lost its bearings, and the superstitious ideas of the age led the men to believe that they were the victims of some infernal witchcraft. One of the foreign leaders, Sottim the Cruel, endeavoured to put an end to a massacre which threatened to cause terror and confusion throughout the army. He called a halt, conjured his men in the interests of their own safety to overcome their fears, and at the head of fifty determined Normans, he started to explore the underwood. But scarcely had the little band plunged into the inextricable windings of a by-path than a volley of arrows descended from the tree-tops and arose from the depths of the thickets, striking down Sottim the Cruel and his fifty companions.

The disappearance of these scouts and their intrepid leader, redoubled the terror of the Normans, and lent them wings to fly through Sherwood Forest to Nottingham. Arrived there, spent with fatigue, and furious with rage, they abandoned themselves with fresh zest to the unqualified excesses which had signalised their sojourn in the valley of Mansfield.

On the morrow of these fatal reprisals, the army, still led by King John, made its way into Yorkshire, burning and massacring at will the unoffending inhabitants of the villages through which it passed.

Whilst the Normans thus ploughed for themselves a furrow of tears and blood

and fire, the Saxons, some of whom had been despoiled of their wealth, others violently torn from their wives and children, joined themselves, drunk in their turn with murder and carnage, to Robin's band, and our hero, at the head of eight hundred brave Saxons, started in pursuit of the blood-stained cohort.

A providential chance protected the peaceful dwelling of Allan Clare and the Castle of Sir Richard of the Plain. Neither of these two houses was in the way of the pillagers, for it goes without saying that John did not spare the rich Saxons. He chased them from their dwellings, and permitted his favourites to instal themselves as masters in the homes of the unhappy gentlemen. But then Robin and his formidable companions would arrive, and the new owner and the soldiers whom he had paid to help him to maintain by force the rights of this unjust usurpation, fell into the hands of the Outlaws and were mercilessly put to death.

The King learned from the public outcry, and the complaints of his men, of the Saxons' triumphal avenging progress, and sent against him a small portion of his army, hoping that it would succeed in investing Robin Hood's band, which was said to be encamped in a little wood. It is hardly necessary to say that John's soldiers had not even the satisfaction of returning to announce their defeat to the King; they were killed without having so much as reached the supposed camp in which they were to surprise Robin Hood.

Our hero's prowess made a great noise throughout England, and his name became as formidable to the Normans as had been that of Hereward the Wake to their predecessors in the reign of William I.

John reached Edinburgh, but not being able to capture the King of Scotland, he returned to Dover, leaving orders to his scattered troops to rejoin him. But the greater part of these troops were captured by Robin Hood's men, some in Derbyshire and some in Yorkshire. In the mean time King John died and his son Henry succeeded him.

In the reign of this Prince, Robin Hood's existence was not so adventurous or active as it had been during the blood-stained reign of King John, for the Earl of Pembroke, tutor to the young King, set to work seriously to improve the condition of the people, and succeeded in maintaining peace throughout the kingdom.

The sudden suspension of all physical and mental activity depressed Robin and weakened his powers. It is true our hero was no longer young; he had attained his fifty-fifth year, while Little John was gently nearing his sixty-sixth. As we have already mentioned, time had brought no solace to Robin's grief, and the memory of Marian, as lively and fresh as on the morrow of their parting, had sealed Robin's heart to any other love.

Marian's tomb, piously tended by the Merrie Men, was covered every year with fresh flowers; and many a time, after the return of peace, had the Foresters surprised their Chieftain, pale and sad, kneeling upon the greensward which extended like a green girdle around the Trysting Tree.

Day by day, Robin's sorrow grew deeper and more overpowering. Day by day, his face took a more dejected expression; the smile left his lips, and John, the patient and devoted John, could not always succeed in obtaining from his friend a reply to his anxious questions.

It came about, however, at long last, that Robin was touched by his comrade's care for him, and he consented, at his prayer, to seek the assistance of a Lady Abbess whose convent was a short distance from Sherwood Forest. The Abbess, who had already seen Robin Hood and knew all the particulars of his life, welcomed him heartily, and offered him every assistance in her power to bestow.

Robin Hood showed himself sensible of the frank welcome of the kindly Nun, and asked her if she would be good enough to bleed him immediately. The Abbess consented. She led the sick man to a cell, and with wondrous skill she performed the wished-for operation; then, as skilfully as a clever physician could have done, she bandaged up the invalid's arm and left him, nearly worn out, stretched upon a bed.

A strangely cruel smile played about the Nun's lips when, coming out from the cell, she locked the door and carried away the key. Let us say a few words about the Nun in question.

She was related to Sir Guy of Gisborne, the Norman Knight who, in an expedition, attempted with the aid of Lord Fitz-Alwine, against the Merrie Men, had had the misfortune to die the death which he had hoped to give Robin Hood. However, it would not have occurred to this woman to avenge her cousin, had not the



latter's brother, too cowardly to expose himself in an honourable combat, persuaded her that she would be doing both an act of justice and a good deed in ridding the kingdom of England of the too celebrated Outlaw. The weak-minded Abbess submitted to the will of the miserable Norman. She committed the murder, and cut the radial artery of the unsuspecting Outlaw.

Having left the sick man for an hour to the overpowering sleep which was the inevitable consequence of so great a loss of blood, the Nun went silently to him again, took off the bandage which covered the vein, and when the blood had again begun to flow, she crept away on tip-toe.

Robin Hood slept till morning with no feeling of discomfort, but when he opened his eyes and tried to rise, he felt so weak that he thought his last hour was come. The blood, which had flowed ceaselessly from the wound, flooded the bed, and Robin Hood then grasped the full danger of the situation. By an almost superhuman effort of will he managed to drag himself to the door. He tried to open it, found it was locked, and, still sustained by the strength of his will—a will so powerful that it succeeded in reviving his exhausted body—he got to the window, opened it, and leaning out, tried to leap from the sill; then, failing in this, he made one last appeal to Heaven, and, as though inspired by his good angel, he took his hunting-horn, raised it to his lips, and with difficulty made some feeble sounds.

Little John, who could not be separated from his well-beloved comrade without sorrow, had passed the night under the walls of the Convent. He had just awakened, and was preparing to take measures to see Robin Hood, when the dying echoes of the hunting-horn sounded in his ears.

"Treachery! treachery!" cried John, running like a madman towards the little wood where a party of the Merrie Men had encamped for the night. "To the Abbey, my lads! to the Abbey! Robin Hood is calling to us! Robin Hood is in danger!"

In an instant the Foresters were on their feet and hastening in the wake of Little John, who was hammering at the gate of the Abbey. The attendant refused to open. John lost not a second in prayers, which he knew would be of no avail. He smashed in the door with a boulder of granite laying at hand, and guided by the

sound of the horn, he gained the cell where, in a pool of blood, lay poor Robin Hood. At the sight of Robin dying, the strong Forester felt his strength fail him; tears of grief and indignation rolled down his bronzed cheeks. He fell on his knees, and taking his old friend in his arms, he said to him amid his sobs—

"Master, my well-beloved master, who hath committed the infamous crime of striking a sick man? Whose is the sacrilegious hand which hath committed this murder in a Holy House? Answer me, for pity's sake, answer!"

Robin slowly shook his head. "What boots it," he said, "now that all is over for me? Now that I have lost to the last drop all the blood in my veins——"

"Robin," replied John, "tell me the truth. I ought to know; I must know. Must I accuse this cowardly assassin of deliberate treachery?"

Robin nodded his head.

"Well, beloved friend," continued John, "give me the supreme satisfaction of avenging thy death. Permit me in my turn to bring murder and sorrow where murder hath been committed, where for me hath arisen the most cruel sorrow. Say one word, make one sign, not one vestige of this hateful house shall remain. I will have it destroyed stone by stone. I still have the strength of a giant, and I have five hundred brave men to come to my assistance."

"Nay, John, nay! I do not wish thee to lift up thy clean and honest hands against these women who are vowed to God; that would be sacrilege. She who hath slain me obeyed, doubtless, a will stronger than her religious feelings. She will suffer the tortures of remorse in this life, and she repent; and she will be punished in the next world, and she win not from Heaven the pardon which I accord her. Thou dost know, John, that I have never harmed a woman nor permitted one to be harmed, and for me a Nun is doubly sacred and to be respected. Let us speak no more of that, my friend. Give me my bow and arrow. Carry me to the window. I would breathe my last where my last arrow falleth."

Robin Hood, supported by Little John, took aim, drew the string of his bow, and the arrow, skimming the tree-tops like a bird, fell some distance away.

"Farewell, good bow; farewell, trusty arrows," murmured Robin, in a trembling

voice, letting them slip from his hands. "John, my friend," he added, in a calmer tone, "bear me to the spot where I have said that I wished to die."

Little John gathered Robin in his arms, and laden with this precious burden went down to the Court of the Convent, where, by his orders, the Merrie Men had quietly assembled. But, at the sight of their Chief lying like a child against John's strong shoulder, at the sight of his white face, they uttered a cry of fury, and wanted to punish forthwith those who had struck Robin.

"Peace, my lads!" said John; "leave vengeance to God. For the moment the state of our well-beloved master should alone occupy our thoughts. All of you follow me to the place where the last arrow shot by Robin is to be found."

The troop divided in two to make a passage for the old man between them, and John walked on with a firm step, and soon gained the spot where Robin's arrow was stuck in the ground.

There John spread upon the turf some garments brought by the Merrie Men, and on them he laid, with infinite precautions, the poor sufferer.

"Now," said Robin, in a weak voice, "call all my Merrie Men. I would be surrounded once again by the brave hearts that have served me so well and so faithfully. I would breathe my last in the midst of my gallant, my life-long comrades."

John sounded the horn three several times, for this call, while warning the Outlaws of an imminent danger, hastened their progress.

Among the men who came in response to John's bugle-call was Will Scarlett; for although he had ceased to belong to the band, he paid them frequent visits, and he rarely passed a week without coming to greet his friends and bringing down a stag, which he would share with them.

We will not attempt to depict William's despair and stupefaction on learning Robin's condition, and seeing the distorted countenance of that dear friend who was so worthy of the love that he inspired.

"Holy Virgin!" said Will. "Ah! my poor friend! my poor brother! my dear Robin, what hath happened? Tell me all; art wounded? Doth he who laid his cursed hand upon thee still live? Tell me, tell me, and to-morrow he will have expiated his crime!"

Robin Hood raised his aching head from John's arm, upon which it had been resting, looked at Will with an expression

of lively tenderness, saying, with a sad, wan smile—

"I thank thee, good Will, but I do not wish to be avenged. Put from thy heart all feeling of hatred for the murderer of one who dies, if not without regret, at least without pain. Doubtless I had reached the term of my existence, since the Divine Mother of the Saviour, my Holy Protectress, hath abandoned me at this fatal moment. I have lived long, Will, and I have been loved and honoured by all who have known me. Painful though it be to leave you, good and dear friends," continued Robin, with a tender look at Little John and Will, "that grief is sweetened by a Christian thought, by the certainty that our separation will not be for ever, and that God will unite us in a better world. Thy presence at my death-bed is a great consolation to me, dear Will, dear brother; for, indeed, we have been good and loving brothers. I thank thee for all the tokens of affection with which thou hast surrounded me. I bless thee with heart and with lips; I pray the Holy Mother to make thee as happy as thou dost deserve to be. Thou wilt tell thy dear wife Maude from me, that I did not forget her when praying for thy happiness, and thou wilt embrace her for her brother, Robin Hood."

William sobbed convulsively.

"Weep not, Will," said Robin, after a moment's silence; "thou dost grieve me too much. Has thy heart then become as weak as a woman's that thou canst not bear sorrow more hardily?"

William did not reply; he was choked with tears.

"Old comrades, dear friends of my heart," continued Robin, addressing the Merrie Men grouped silently around him, "ye who have shared my toils and my dangers, my joy and my grief, with a devotion and fidelity beyond all praise, take my last thanks and my blessing. Farewell, my brothers; brave Saxon hearts, farewell. Ye have been the terror of the Normans; ye have gained for ever the love and gratitude of the poor. Be happy, be blessed, and pray sometimes to our dear Protectress, the Mother of the Saviour of Mankind, for your absent friend—for Robin Hood."

Stifled groans were the only reply to Robin's words. Distracted with grief, the yeomen heard these farewells, but refused to realise their cruel significance.

"And thou, Little John," resumed the dying man, in a voice that grew weaker



every moment, "thou of the noble heart, thou whom I love with all the strength of my soul, what will become of thee? To whom wilt thou give the affection thou didst bestow on me? With whom wilt thou dwell beneath the grand old forest trees? Oh, John! thou wilt be very lonely, very desolate, very miserable; forgive me for leaving thee thus. I had hoped for a sweeter death. I had hoped to die with thee, beside thee, bow in hand, defending my country. God hath willed it otherwise. Praised be His Name! My hour approaches, John. Mine eyes are failing. Give me thy hand; I would die holding it in mine own, John. Thou dost know my wishes; thou knowest where my mortal remains are to be interred—beneath the Trysting Tree, beside her who awaits me—beside Marian."

"Yea, yea!" sighed John, sadly, his eyes brimming with tears; "thou shalt be——"

"I thank thee, old friend. I die happy. I go to be with Marian for ever. Farewell, John——" The great Outlaw's dying voice became inaudible. A light breath touched Little John's face, and the soul of the friend he had so dearly loved took its flight from earth.

"To your knees, my children!" said the old man, crossing himself; "the noble and generous Robin Hood hath ceased to live!"

All heads were bowed as William uttered a short but fervent prayer over Robin; then, with the help of Little John, he carried the body to its last resting-place. Two Foresters dug the grave beside Marian, and there Robin was laid upon a bed of flowers and foliage. Little John placed Robin's bows and arrows beside him; and the dead man's favourite dog, which might never serve another master, was killed upon the grave and interred with him.

Thus ended the career of one of the most extraordinary characters in the annals of England. May he rest in peace!

The possessions of the band were loyally divided among its members by Little John, who wished to pass the remaining days of his sorrowful life in some peaceful retreat. The Outlaws separated, some going to live in Nottingham, others settling down here and there in the neighbouring counties, but none had the heart to remain in the old green

wood. Robin Hood's death had rendered that abode too painfully sad.

Little John could not decide to leave the Forest after all. He stayed there for several days, wandering about the deserted paths like a soul in pain, and calling aloud to him who would never answer him again. At last he decided to go and seek shelter with Will Scarlett. Will received him with open arms, and sad as he was himself, he tried to afford some consolation to this inconsolable grief; but John would not be comforted.

One morning William, seeking for Little John, found him in the garden, standing upright, his back against an oak, and his head turned toward the Forest. John's face was very pale; his fixed and staring eyes appeared to have no sight in them. William seized his cousin's arm in terror, and called to him in a trembling voice; but the old man made no reply—he was dead.

This unexpected blow was a great grief to William. He carried Little John into the house, and the next day the whole Gamwell family followed this second dearly-loved brother to Hathersage Churchyard, situated six miles from Castleton in Derbyshire.

The tomb containing the remains of Little John still exists, and is remarkable for the extraordinary length of the stone that covers it. This stone presents to a curious eye two initials, J. N., very artfully engraven in the heart of the granite.

A legend recounts that a certain antiquary, a great lover of the curious, had the gigantic tomb opened, removed the bones, and bore them away as worthy of a place in his cabinet of anatomical curiosities. Unhappily for the worthy man of learning, from the moment that these human remains entered his house, he knew no repose; he was visited by sickness, ruin, and death. And the grave-digger who had helped to profane the tomb was equally afflicted in his tenderest feelings. Then the two men understood that they had offended against Heaven in violating the secrets of a tomb, and they piously reinterred the old Forester's remains in holy ground.

After which the antiquary and the grave-digger lived quietly and happily. God, who grants remission to all repented sins, had pardoned their sacrilege.











